

**OBSERVATIONS
ON
THE BIBLE**

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A. de R. Clarke

THE VILLAGERS' HYMN TO THE SCRIPTURES.

Lamp of our feet! whose hallowed beam
Deep in our hearts its dwelling hath,
How welcome is the cheering gleam
Thou sheddest o'er our lowly path!
Light of our way! whose rays are flung
In mercy o'er our pilgrim road,
How blessed, its dark shades among,
The star that guides us to our God?

Our fathers, in the days gone by,
Read thee in dim and sacred caves,
Or in the deep wood silently,
Met were thick branches o'er them waved,
To seek the hope thy record gave,
When thou wert a forbidden thing,
And the strong chain and bloody grave
Were all on earth thy love could bring.

Our fathers in the days gone by
Read thee while peril o'er them hung;
But we, beneath the open sky,
May search thy leaves of truth along;
Fearless, our daily haunts among,
May chant the hallowed lays of old,
Once by the shepherd minstrel sung,
When Israel's hills o'erhung his told.

In the sweet morning's hour of prime
Thy blessed words our lips engage,
And round our hearths at evening time
Our children spell the holy page;
The waymark through long distant years,
To guide their wandering footsteps on,
Till thy last loveliest beam appears,
Written on the grey churchyard stone.

Word of the holy and the just!
To leave thee pure, our fathers bled,
Thou art to us a sacred trust,
A relic of the martyr dead!
Among the valleys where they fell,
The ashes of our fathers sleep!
May we who round them safely dwell,
Pure as themselves the record keep!

Lamp of our feet! which day by day
Are passing to the quiet tomb,
If on it fall thy peaceful ray,
Our last low dwelling hath no gloom.
How beautiful their calm repose
To whom that blessed hope was given,
Whose pilgrimage on earth was closed
By the unfolding gates of heaven!







O B S E R V A T I O N S

ON THE

B I B L E ,

FOR THE USE OF

Y O U N G P E R S O N S .

A glory gilds the sacred page,
Majestic like the sun !
It gives a light to every age ;
It gives, but borrows none.

BOSTON :

1842.

JOHN H. EASTBURN.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS little tract was written for my children; that when they begin to perceive the difficulties which occur in reading the Bible, they may be put in the way of discovering the explanation of them; and that they may be, in some degree, prepared to meet and answer the cavils of the infidel, and the pretensions of those who claim an exclusive right to the name of Christian.

A species of error, or what seems to me error, has lately sprung up anew in the world, after having been, again and again, banished from all rational society, viz: mysticism, confounding the impression made upon us by the vague and the vast with profoundness of thought; confusing the operations of the understanding by suffering the feelings, the wishes, what are called the aspirations of the soul, to interfere with the intellect;

and transforming dreamy, shadowy phantoms of ideas into proofs of the greatness of the dreamer's immortal spirit, or proofs of its divinity, or proofs of religious character, or into proofs of any thing. Against this I wished to guard my children, and in conveying to them my own idea of what constitutes religion, to show them that no substitute for it can be found in obedience to earthly superiors, in the adoption of a particular creed, in adherence to certain forms, or in the abandonment of all forms.

I desired, also, to show, as distinctly as I could, what were the peculiar merits of the books which contain the record of the lives and thoughts of men eminent in the religious history of the world, and the characteristic excellences of those men themselves; that my household, at least, should regard them neither with indifference, nor contempt, nor with a blind, superstitious reverence; but that, holding them in deserved respect, they might know the reasons on which that respect should be founded.

In doing this, I have combined the results of former studies, with those of recent reflection, without attempting to distinguish between ideas derived from others, and those which are my own. I have merely given expression to what I found in my own mind, however it might have got there.

The design of the work explains the familiar tone prevailing through it. I will only add, that my experience has been altogether in the active business of life, and that I do not belong to the clerical profession,

March, 1842.

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OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE Bible contains the only rational account of the creation of the world, and of the early history of the human race, which is known to exist. There are many things in the narrative which are difficult to be understood or believed, and the explanations of wise and learned men have been very various. These difficulties relate, for the most part, however, to incidents of little importance ; to details, which may, or may not, have occurred precisely as they are recorded, without impairing our confidence in the sufficient accuracy of the general current of the story.

The history, and all the other works written at different periods, which make up the volume we call the Bible, were written by men who were born in Asia, and belonged to a race whose habits and modes of thinking and speaking were very different from those of the nations who inhabited any part of Europe, and especially from those of the more northern people from whom we are descended. It is very difficult for us to understand the figurative style of speaking, the strong exaggerations, and the extravagant statements in which

the Orientals delight ; and it is only by becoming familiar with the mode in which the Asiatic nations write and speak at the present day, and have always written and spoken, as far back as their language and habits can be traced, that we can fully appreciate the fact that the historical and other books of the Bible were written in the same style, and are to be interpreted as other Oriental writings require to be understood. The European race have less imagination, and being more inclined to simple statements of fact, are liable to fall into great errors in interpreting eastern compositions, unless this remarkable difference of character be constantly borne in mind.

For a long period, in the history of the religious world, this circumstance was not taken into consideration at all, and it was even thought impious to suggest it. It was said that the Bible was the “word of “God,” and that the men who penned it were merely instruments in His hands to write what should be dictated to them by an irresistible inspiration. Thus the literal interpretation of one of those Oriental figures of speech, by which human language was called the “*Word of God*,” prevented the right understanding of thousands of other forms of expression of similar character. Though this idea of a verbal inspiration of the scriptures is not now universal, yet the effects of its long prevalence are manifest in what I think the unhappy errors which have been perpetuated from generation to generation, and have become embodied in systems of theology which are the professed doctrines of a very large proportion of the Christian church.

The books of the Old Testament contain history, poetry, prophecy, biography, and a peculiar species of composition called proverbs, little sentences in which much meaning is condensed into few words. These books were all originally written in Hebrew, by men who lived at different periods ; and it is a very curious circumstance that the history of the Hebrew nation, one that has by no means been very conspicuous in the political history of the world, that inhabited a very circumscribed territory, and was neither very numerous nor powerful at any period, should have been so much better preserved than that of contemporary, or more powerful, or more populous nations.

Another thing which is particularly striking is, that this people, certainly not pre-eminent for their intellectual or moral elevation, should have been so far in advance of all others as they were on the subject of the nature and attributes of God, man's relation to Him, and the duties which arise from that relation. For a long series of ages, the worship of the true and only God was, with some difficulty, preserved among the Hebrews, and by them alone of all the nations of the world, till the time arrived for a more perfect revelation of His character and will, which was made first to this people, and afterwards to nations who, from their greater civilization, ingenuity, and cultivation, might have been expected to have been as much in advance of the Jews on this subject, as they were on others.

The great superiority of the religious literature of the Jews, and the incomparable sublimity and beauty

of their religious poetry, are things which it would be difficult to explain by reference to their intellectual powers alone. They show in a very striking manner the superiority of truth over fiction ; especially of the sublime truths of true religion over the absurd fables of man's invention, even upon minds of the most common capacity. If the Egyptians or Greeks had been favored with this knowledge, it might and doubtless would have been said, that it was their wisdom and learning which gave them their religious as well as their intellectual superiority. But this can scarcely be said of the Hebrews. They were not superior to their neighbours in any one thing but their knowledge of the nature and character of the Deity ; and how could it happen that they should be so much better informed than all other people on this single point ? I can account for it in no way but by the belief that the narrative contained in their books, of a special interference of God, for the purpose of keeping alive among one people, at least, the knowledge of Himself, is substantially true ; and that they were selected as the depositaries of this most important knowledge, for this reason, among others, that it would not be imagined that they could, of their own bright understandings, have invented this system of theology, and that it rested on no higher authority than the idolatry and folly which were the result of the religious studies of other nations.

Consider this till you obtain a clear idea of the argument. If all the other nations of antiquity, (and all of modern times too, where Christianity is unknown) have been totally ignorant on this subject, and however

enlightened, ingenious, wise, and civilized on all other points, have fallen into the greatest absurdities on this, and adopted ideas either glaringly silly, or so exceedingly gross that they can scarcely be mentioned, how does it happen that the Jews alone possessed this sublime knowledge? Does not this single circumstance suffice to show that there must have been an interposition, of some sort, by God in their favor? I cannot but think it does. And this interposition, so long continued, and ending at last in the still more wonderful revelation by Jesus Christ, renders their history and their literature exceedingly interesting—far more so than those of any other people.

The knowledge of the character of our Creator, and of the object of our creation, may truly be said to be of infinite importance to us. There is no other knowledge which can be compared with it, for effect upon the character and conduct. Philosophy may teach us what is to be, by a careful and wise observation of what is, and of what has been. But how uncertain after all, are her best inferences! How difficult to feel sure that the sphere of observation has been wide enough to justify the conclusion! And how feeble is her influence, opposed, as it often is, by that of the imagination, the senses and the passions!

But let us once be convinced that God is a perfect being, and that He has created us with certain faculties, which He has given us the power, and made it our duty to improve, and the principal difficulty in understanding our position, and the end and object of our being is at once removed. We are here to improve

the capacity God has given us, as far as the circumstances in which He has placed us will permit; and if we ask why we are placed here rather than in another planet, or why we have precisely human powers, rather than the faculties of angels or animals, we ought to be satisfied with the answer, that we are not in a condition to understand the reason. It can be explained only to a being who is able to comprehend the constitution of the whole universe, of which we are not capable; and we must therefore wait for the explanation till God shall see fit to enable us to understand it. To doubt His perfection, because we feel our own infirmity and narrowness of power, is a very weak and false conclusion to reach.

And so of the circumstances which surround us in life, there are many which seem to us strange, what we call mysterious and inexplicable. But as it is quite impossible that we should know all the bearings and relations of those circumstances, their appearing inexplicable to us proves nothing more than our own weakness and imperfection; not that the circumstances are really unintelligible, but that we are not able to find out the explanation.

This weakness and imperfection of our nature and capacity is a thing never to be forgotten, whether we are engaged in the attempt to understand the obscurities of God's providence, or are endeavoring to explain the difficulties of His word.

There are certain great general truths of which we may be convinced, and in which we must be contented to rest with unwavering confidence, notwithstanding

that circumstances, or language, may sometimes appear, to our limited views, inconsistent with those all important truths. The less important and the doubtful must yield to the more important and the certain. Thus it is certain that our capacities are limited to a much narrower sphere than we can perceive to be occupied by the wonders of creation ; that we do not understand the manner in which many things we see passing around us are brought about, (indeed we do not know the process by which a single blade of grass is made to grow, or to perish) that beauty and happiness abound in that portion of the universe with which we are somewhat acquainted, and that suffering and deformity are not the rule of being, as they would be if the Deity were malignant, and as they might be if He were weak or imperfect. Whereas it is only doubtful whether the event, or the language, which seems to us inconsistent with the perfection of God, be really so or not. We cannot know that it is ; but we do know our own ignorance. Which, then, is the fair inference, that we cannot see all the designs of the Almighty, or that He is capricious, or cruel, or weak ?

In estimating the value of the Bible to the world, we must remember that we are indebted to it, and to it alone, for all the just views of the character of God, and the character and condition of man that have ever prevailed extensively. Here and there a philosopher may have thrown out a hint of his suspicion that the Creator was a great and good being, but no such opinion ever prevailed, with an operative influence upon the minds of men, except through the agency of the

various works called the Bible. And why is it that these works have produced such an extraordinary effect? It is not merely because they speak in uniform consistency with the language of nature, but that they speak with more explicitness, and with an authority which they derive from the interposition of God to impress these all important truths upon men's minds; and because they contain the evidence of that which renders all that would otherwise be mysterious to us, at once clear and satisfactory, viz: the evidence of our being designed to live after our existence here shall have terminated.

It is this which illuminates all that is dark or obscure in this life, and which makes, or ought to make, our reliance upon God perfect; while, without the knowledge of a future state, the doubt and perplexity, and vain imaginations which overshadow all other people, would have been our portion also. Is it not natural to say, therefore, that the knowledge of these things is of *infinite* importance to mankind? The scriptures very justly represent it so, and state, in various ways, the immeasurable value to men of an acquaintance with God and themselves, their situation, and the object of their existence.

I must add that, in my belief, it is this knowledge alone which gives their peculiar value to the scriptures. It is not because God has determined to give future life to those who are favored with the Bible, and to deprive of existence, or of happiness, all other human beings, (as some have shockingly supposed) nor is it because a happy state of existence hereafter depends

upon a right understanding of the phraseology of the Bible, or on a belief in certain dogmas relative to the divine and human character and conduct, that we should value the Bible, and study it with care. It is not necessary to believe that all heathen nations are to perish everlastingily, in order to make us prize the revelation of God's character and will. Neither is it necessary that we should believe the happiness or misery of an eternal life depends upon our right interpretation of certain passages in the Bible, in order that we may feel a deep reverence for the scriptures, and an earnest desire to understand them aright, and to study them thoughtfully and conscientiously.

You will perceive hereafter, when you learn the astonishing importance attached by some theologians to certain sentences in the Bible, why I am anxious to present this view to your minds in the outset. God has given you understanding, that you may read and compare His works and His word, and inquire and judge for yourselves what is the meaning of each and of all. Never surrender this power, and right, and duty to any other person. Do not be alarmed, if men, fallible men, say that you must believe this or that doctrine, because it is in the Bible. Look for yourselves, as carefully as you can, and if you do not find it there, it is not there, *to you*. And no man, according to the language of the book regarded by all with such reverence, has a right to say that you are in danger of eternal suffering, because you interpret the Bible differently from him. “Who art thou that judgest another man’s ‘servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.’”

We are all the servants of our Maker, and no other can give us either life or death, nor determine with precision what his own, or our future state will be. The imperfection of our faculties is proof enough that we are not designed to be lords and masters over each other, in matters of the understanding ; and while the wisest so frequently err in their observations and their deductions, and the best so frequently in their sense of duty, it becomes us all to be mutually charitable and respectful.

At the same time that I wish to inculcate this independence of the unwarranted dominion of others, I by no means desire to exonerate you from feeling and testifying the respect to which they are truly entitled. If modesty be becoming in all, it is indispensable in those whose short experience, and unpractised minds need all the aid they can find to enable them to perform their part well in the world.

It is one of the characteristics of youth and inexperience, not to be aware of this necessity. Ignorant of what is to be learned and done, the young are unconscious, to a great extent, of their own deficiencies, and are prone to a degree of self-reliance which gradually diminishes as they advance in life and wisdom. The sooner reflection brings them to the perception of their weakness and ignorance, the sooner they deserve and enjoy the respect of those who are older and wiser than themselves. The perfection of youthful character in this respect would be, to feel deference for the views and opinions of others, proportioned to their relative wisdom and knowledge, without surrendering the con-

victions of their own understanding after comparing, as far as opportunity allows, the different conclusions of different minds.

In saying just now, that the communication of truth respecting God and man, was the only thing that gave peculiar value to the Bible, I should have confined the remark to religious subjects. There are other things which give an interest and value to the scriptures, altogether superior to those possessed by any other works, in any language. In the first place, the wisdom which is shown by many of the writers, the acquaintance with human nature, in its weakness and its strength, its beauty and its deformity, and the adaptation of the motives addressed to the human mind, motives which operate now as they did three or four thousand years ago, are all very remarkable and very superior to the similar qualities shown by any other writers, ancient or modern. This knowledge of our universal nature is a great charm in an author, and raises him who shows it to the highest rank, in the estimation of his fellow men. It is the mark of great power of observation and reflection. Now in that collection of books called the Bible, there is more wisdom, and more knowledge of the human heart, so far as I can judge, than in all the other books I have ever read put together. There are a multitude of passages which prove this great wisdom, but scarcely one which indicates that the writer was ignorant or superficial on the subject. Every thing is adapted to the end designed; every thing is described with a clear understanding of motives and intentions, and with a beautiful and wonderful simplicity.

And all this is very strikingly different from most other histories and poems, whether ancient or modern, in which we can very rarely discern that just judgment of motives, and are often misled by the prejudices, or narrow views of the writer; and in modern times especially, we are annoyed by a style of ambitious display, which compares very unfavorably with the simplicity and discernment exhibited in the Bible.

Another thing which challenges admiration is the great beauty of the poetry and the analogues scattered throughout the volume. The poetry never has been and probably never will be surpassed; and the various stories which occur are as sublime for the wise instruction they contain, as they are beautiful for the language in which it is conveyed. The examples and the warnings which may be drawn from the real characters delineated, especially in the New Testament, are beyond all compare more instructive than any that can be deduced from similar descriptions in any or all other works.

We have reasons enough then for the deepest interest in studying this collection of works, from the subjects of which they principally treat, and their manner of treating them. It is quite unnecessary to overstate their claims to respect, by setting up pretensions their authors never made, or by asserting that a knowledge of the scriptures is the only passport to Heaven, or that we are to be forever excluded from it, if we do not interpret aright what is difficult, obscure or perplexing. We are to use our best efforts to understand the Bible and we shall scarcely fail to do so, if we

properly appreciate the importance of the subject; but having done that, we are responsible to our Maker alone, and may safely say to any human being, who undertakes to condemn our interpretation, “Who made ‘thee a judge over me?’” How is it possible for one imperfect being to say to another with the confidence we sometimes witness—I am right and you are wrong? We are all right, if we are conscientious. We are all wrong, if we are not conscientious. This presumption, however, when it arises from a proper though misdirected feeling of reverence for particular parts of the scriptures, which have made a deep impression on the mind, is very excusable, and indeed very honorable to the motives which actuate the individual—infinitely more so, at least, than the opposite fault, of despising the book which contains such instruction, such beauty, sublimity, and simplicity, and which treats of subjects that every rational being must regard as of the greatest moment.

Incredulity, after examination, is a thing which, though difficult to understand, may be forgiven. Levity, inattention to the highest of all studies, admit of no excuse. I beg you, therefore, to read the Bible with the greatest care, and to keep the most useful and beautiful parts of it fresh in your memory, by frequent reperusal, and to seek explanations of such difficulties as occur to you in suitable works, or of those persons who are most likely to be able to give you the information you desire. I am about to prepare for you such brief remarks upon the character and contents of these works as will, I hope, aid you in your efforts to understand them, or at least, shew you the proper methods to pursue in studying them.

CHAPTER II. GENESIS.

The first five books which we find on opening the Bible were probably written by Moses, the lawgiver of the Jews, who lived about twenty-four or twenty-five hundred years after the creation of man. The first of these books contains the history of the world previous to his own time, and the others an account of himself and his nation to the time of his death.

A great many questions and controversies have been started by critics, philosophers and skeptics, about the accuracy of this history of the creation. One man asks, for instance, how day and night could exist before the creation of the sun, which was not made till the fourth *day*; another informs us that the discoveries of modern times prove the existence of the world for a much longer period than is assigned to it by the Bible history, and of a series of convulsions and slow formations, of which no notice is taken in the account by Moses; while a third laughs at what he calls the idle stories of the forming of woman from the rib of man, the garden of Eden, and man's fall and expulsion therefrom.

If the precise accuracy of the narrative is to be insisted on, as it must be if supposed to come directly from the Almighty as a history, these questions and cavils would be very embarrassing; but if Moses be supposed to have used, as well as he could, the “understanding” which is called “the inspiration of the

“ Almighty,” (Job 32, 8,) and of which he had no common share, in collecting the traditions that seemed to him most authentic, among those which were current in his day on these subjects, we shall feel no hesitation in entertaining a high, but not superstitious, reverence for these venerable traditions, and we shall find no great difficulty, I apprehend, in reconciling the leading facts, as narrated, with the discoveries of science, or with the lessons of wisdom and experience. What difficulty is there, for instance, in supposing the word “day” to refer to some indefinite period of time, during which, perhaps, those changes of the surface of the globe which philosophers think they have discovered, may have taken place? Or even, why should we not believe that those seemingly slow changes may have happened during a single revolution of the earth, which we now call a day? To omnipotence “one day is as ‘a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.’”

Another mode of explaining the account is that certain changes took place on the surface of the earth, which had already been in existence for ages, to prepare it for the residence of man; and that these changes are described, without particular limitation of time, as they would successively have appeared to human eyes, had men been existing to observe them. This seems to me a very natural and rational mode of interpretation.

But if we reject this account as containing inconsistencies and incredible things, where is there any other which is better, or indeed any at all? For simplicity

and sublimity it cannot be surpassed, and for its accuracy in the assertion that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” nothing that science or philosophy has discovered, or can discover, gives any ground to impeach it. It is said by those who have most carefully examined the subject, that modern science confirms, in a surprising manner, the principal statements of Moses in the brief sketch of creation, and particularly of the proximate date of the formation of man with which he commenced his writings.

Then with regard to the mode of the creation of man, his fall and expulsion from Eden, suppose circumstances are mentioned which did not happen, or even suppose the whole to be a parable—it is still a beautiful and instructive one; and while there is nothing intrinsically incredible in it, I think he must be considered unreasonable, who cavils at this only and interesting account of the creation of man, which, if true, is a most valuable history, and if not true, a most instructive apologue.

I do not think it would be at all inconsistent with due reverence to suppose that the paradise meant in the story is the state of innocence itself, and that the death which was threatened, and the expulsion which followed upon disobedience were intended to represent the horrors which are the consequences of conscious guilt, and the impossibility of recovering the lost Eden of innocence. Remember, then, you who are yet guiltless of any serious offences, that your present state of innocence, if once lost, can never be restored, and

that “a flaming sword turning every way” will be found to penetrate your heart with feelings much worse than physical suffering—even than death itself.

Much has been said of the improbability, and even the impossibility of the descent of all the varieties of the human species from a single stock. But the impossibility has never been shown, and the improbability appears greater at the first suggestion of the idea, than it does upon examination, when the difficulties in the case diminish very much, if they do not altogether disappear; and the power of circumstances—what are called *accidents*, but which in reality are God’s arrangements—is found wonderfully great over the physical and even the moral qualities of mankind.

The effect of time is scarcely enough appreciated in estimating difficulties of this sort. The improvement or corruption of the species is pretty rapid from generation to generation, as we may perceive, by comparing different periods with which we are somewhat acquainted. It is about eight hundred years since the invasion of England by William of Normandy, and if we compare the modern, cultivated, high bred Englishman, with his Saxon or Norman progenitor, wild, cruel, and rude as he was at that day, shall we not find difference enough to constitute almost a distinct species? But it is probably more than four thousand years, or five times the period just named, since the deluge; and during that whole length of time the causes of diversity have been in the most active operation.

Again, observe the wonderful difference in the character and appearance of men who inhabit different sides

of a river or a mountain, caused by various forms of government, or national customs which have been long perpetuated. On one side you will see them solemn, phlegmatic, and passive, on the other, mercurial and active. And the physical are as great as the mental differences. Taking such varieties into view, as either existing contemporaneously in neighboring territories, or as succeeding each other in the same country, and recollecting that every climate, soil and form of government, with endless other sources of variety, from Central Africa to Siberia and New Holland, have been actively engaged in creating diversities among mankind, and we shall perhaps wonder rather that there is so much resemblance, than that there is so much difference. How population was scattered over the earth, spreading from land to land, from continent to continent, and island to island, is a question of equal difficulty upon any hypothesis, and no argument from it can properly be urged against the truth of the Bible history, as the facts conflict with that no more than with any other account which can be given of the creation and dispersion of man.

Another cavil has been raised against the truth of the Mosaic account, from the very great length of life ascribed to the antediluvian patriarchs. Great undoubtedly it is, compared with that of which we have any specimens under our observation. But there is nothing intrinsically incredible in it ; and why should not as great a change have taken place, at the deluge, in the constitution of man, as in that of the planet on which he lives ? It is somewhat presumptuous to say—we have never seen a man five hundred years old, therefore it

is absurd to suppose one could live so long. But if the story be set down as a mere tradition, which we may believe or not, as we see probabilities for or against it, is the veracity of Moses impeached? Is his history invalidated? I think not, in any important degree.

After the account of the deluge, the story is speedily narrowed down to the narrative of the selection of Abraham by God, as the ancestor of a chosen people, who were to be the depositaries of a religious truth the knowledge of which would be lost by all the rest of the world. This history is full of the most interesting indications of truth, in the indirect, and as it were accidental allusions to the modes of life, the climate, productions and local characteristics of the region in which the scene is laid. It seems impossible that it should have been written by any one but an inhabitant of that portion of the earth, or that such traditions could have originated any where else; and of those things which are of a miraculous character, and therefore incredible by some minds, an explanation may be given, it seems to me, which may satisfy us of the substantial correctness of the account. For instance, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is said to have been a punishment inflicted by God for the wickedness of those cities, and that messengers, or angels, were sent to warn Lot, as the only good man among them, to escape with his family. Now it is a very common thing, in rude and simple states of society, to attribute uncommon events to the direct action of a superior power; and it is no cause of doubt as to the fact that

towns or cities were destroyed, that men thought it was a punishment for their crimes. On the contrary it seems to me a confirmation of the statement that they were vicious, that the destruction which overtook them was thought by their neighbors to be the act of God. If they were given up to sensual indulgence, brutalizing and degrading their moral and intellectual nature, it is extremely probable that they either would not perceive, or would not understand, the previous indications which are ordinarily given of a volcanic convulsion of nature; while Lot, having the proper use of his faculties, would see the natural signs of an approaching catastrophe, and warned by those wonders which are just as much angels as "prophets sent from God," would effect his escape from the devoted region.

Travellers inform us that there are evident indications, on the shore of the Dead Sea, of a population having once existed there, which is no longer to be found; and which could not, indeed, bear with comfort the influence of the exhalations from that heavy and almost motionless water. Asphaltum and sulphur are not favorable to animal life; and if any population ever resided there, it was probably under very different circumstances from those which now exist.

And why should we refuse to call a convulsion of nature like that an interposition of Providence? It was the act of God, just as much as if the brimstone and fire had been created in another planet, and brought to the destruction of those towns. The course of Providence perpetually rewards and punishes men in this world; sometimes by the operation of physical

agents, like storms and volcanoes, and sometimes by the consequences which God had made them to follow from wrong or well doing. These agreeable or painful occurrences are rewards, trials, or punishments, according to the state of mind and character in which they overtake men; and though I would, by no means, encourage the disposition to interpret such events according to our own fancy, with regard to what befalls others, when we cannot know the whole case, yet every man of reflection and observation may, I think, trace the hand of God in the circumstances which have disciplined him, and the influences which have operated on him, the trials which have afflicted him, and the temptations he has either overcome or yielded to. And it is not the least objection to the truth of a narrative that a miraculous cause is assigned for a transaction, or an event, which may seem to be brought about in the course of nature. It may be, nay, it must be, both a natural event, and one which marks an overruling Providence. The history of the world will not and cannot be read aright, nor to its most valuable purpose, till the general connexion between virtue and prosperity, vice and calamity be acknowledged, nor till events be traced to their moral, as well as their physical and political causes.

Another thing, which has been made a ground of objection to the truth of the Mosaic history, is the constant and direct intercourse which is represented to have taken place between God and men. Conversations are related, from the days of Adam to those of Moses; miraculous manifestations of God are continu-

ally spoken of, and a sort of familiarity seems to have existed incompatible, it is said, alike with nature and reason. If such things occurred in the first two thousand years of the world's history, why have they never happened since?

I think it would not be difficult to point out a reason why the Almighty should treat in a very different manner those who were placed on earth among its first rational inhabitants, and those who succeeded them after a long period, filled with the records of experience, and observation of the ways of God to man. In the first ages of the world there was no experience of the course of Providence, by which God now speaks to us in a most intelligible language; reason was feeble, and the principles of morality and religion had not been developed and enforced as they have since been. Men stood much more in need of direct instruction than now, and what is there irrational in the supposition that it should be given them from time to time?

Doubtless visions, and dreams, and personal intercourse with the Deity are things that may be, and often have been, in all ages of the world, pretended for the purposes of fanaticism or selfishness. But the great distinction between such false pretences, and the simple accounts given in the Bible of divine interposition is, that it is never there spoken of in any such connexion as to show a base or wrong object in him to whom it relates. If God appeared unto Abraham, it was to counsel him—"Walk before me, and be thou perfect," (Gen. 17, 1.) If He spake to Moses, it was to instruct him how to redeem his brethren from bondage;

or to proclaim a code of morality and religion which has been a blessing to all people who have acknowledged its authority from the hour of its promulgation until now; which was wiser, and better adapted to improve human nature by its requirements, than any thing which has since been devised as a substitute for it, and which rendered the people who were possessed of it superior, in religious wisdom, to nations who were superior to them in every thing else. Is this a sort of interposition unworthy of the Deity? Is this to be placed on a level with the visions of those who have gained power or wealth by their dreams, and who have had nothing but these sordid worldly motives for pretending to such communications, and have produced no other consequences? Clearly not. This is a case in which the end and object of the revelation is part, and a most important part, of the evidence to prove it. If the object be good and valuable, it is credible that supernatural means should be used to introduce it. If the end be unworthy, insignificant or selfish, it is incredible.

But if this reasoning be not satisfactory, there is another solution of the difficulty, which, whether the former be just or not, ought not to be forgotten; and that is, that the expression, "God appeared," or "God spake" is not necessarily, nor even properly, to be interpreted literally. It is, of course, a figure of speech; and may be understood with such latitude as is required by the considerations suggested in the outset, from the Oriental and highly figurative style of the composition.

There are other difficulties of phraseology in this

book, such as the expression, “The sons of God saw “the daughters of men, that they were fair;” &c. (Gen. 6, 1) and the phrase “And Jacob went on his “way, and the angels of God met him,” (Gen. 32, 1) but as these difficulties arise, probably, for the most part, from the imperfect acquaintance of scholars with the Hebrew, the most ancient, terse and simple of languages, it is in vain to attempt to give clear and satisfactory explanations of what learned men have not elucidated.

The account of the origin of the Hebrew nation from Abraham, through Isaac, Jacob and his sons, with the very interesting and beautiful story of Joseph, one of those sons, closes the book of Genesis, and brings the history down to the time of the author.

CHAPTER III. EXODUS.

Exodus, or the Departure, gives an account of one of the most stupendous enterprises ever undertaken; one of which the accomplishment has never been regarded, as it seems to me, with any thing like the admiration it deserves. It is difficult to represent to one's self precisely, the position of the parties in this narrative; and the extreme brevity and simplicity of the history has given rise to many objections and cavils which will vanish before a full and fair consideration of the subject, and which in fact arise only from a general feeling of incredulity in respect to any thing extraordinary.

With regard to that whole class of objections drawn from the language of Moses respecting the intercourse of the Deity with him, such as, "God spake to Moses," and "the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh," &c., enough has already been said to show that they present no real difficulty; that they are figures of speech, which by no means necessarily imply a supernatural occurrence, or influence, but may often be taken as the Oriental language for what would be expressed more simply in our Western idiom. Other objections have been made to the miracles which were the evidence of the divine mission of Moses to Pharaoh and the Israelites, as either incredible in themselves, trifling in their character, or showing a vindictive and cruel spirit in the Being by whose omnipotence

they were wrought. I shall give such replies as occur to me to these cavils, which do not appear to me of so much weight as they have sometimes been thought to possess.

I suppose nobody will dispute or doubt the fact that the Israelites were redeemed from bondage to the Egyptians; a slavery which had endured for nearly four hundred years; nor that this was effected through the agency of Moses. Now, this single fact seems to me more astonishing, and indeed incredible, without some supernatural interference, than any recorded miracle; and I think it will appear so to any one who reflects upon the relative position of the two nations, and the influences under which they would naturally act. On the one hand was a nation of slaves, degraded by ages of the most abject servitude, timid, ignorant, and unarmed; on the other a rich, powerful, warlike, and for the time, an instructed people, very determined to retain their property in the Hebrews, and possessed of all the necessary means to do so; the one party an unorganized rabble of between two and three millions of people, the other possessing military organization, power and wealth. It is manifest the Israelites never could have gone without the consent of the Egyptians, and how were they to obtain that consent? It was as if the slaves in our own Southern States should all at once ask their masters to let them go. What chance of escape would there be for them? The Egyptians were as superior to the Israelites, as the white man of Georgia, or Louisiana, is to his negro slave. All the power was on one side; all the abjectness, and the

habit of subjection on the other. If any man thinks that the Egyptians were likely to let them go for the mere asking, and that they would even compel them to go, at last, without some supernatural agency, he certainly has so large a faith that he should not object to the credibility of miracles. He believes in the greatest miracle of all.

Again, how was a nation, in the condition of the Hebrews, to be sustained, kept together, trained and finally established in independence? It would seem an enterprise too vast for human resources alone. I believe it to have been so. I believe no man could now accomplish the somewhat similar enterprise of collecting the negroes in the United States, removing them beyond the Mississippi, conducting them among the prairies and mountains of the West, and finally establishing them in California, or some part of Mexico, as an independent republic. Think of the difficulties attending such an undertaking, and then judge whether Moses could have effected the liberation of the Israelites by human means alone.

If, then, it be less incredible that miracles should have been wrought, than that such a revolution should have been produced without them, is there any thing in the character of the miracles themselves inconsistent with that of the Being by whose power they were performed? I cannot but think they were perfectly suited to the occasion. It should be recollect that they must, of necessity, be miraculous *punishments*. They were not mere displays of power, to prove a superhuman agency. In that case, it would have been natural

for a beneficent Being to have taken means which would, at the same time, have proved his goodness ; like the miracles of Jesus Christ, who healed the sick, fed the hungry, and relieved the infirm. But the miracles of Moses were, from the necessity of the case, of a different character, and cannot be complained of as cruel and vindictive, unless it be shown that more suffering was inflicted than was necessary to produce the justifiable end in view. It would be hard to make this appear ; for after the worst had been done, cupidity so far prevailed over fear, that the Egyptians hastened after their slaves with military preparation, and would have brought them back, at the risk of suffering again all the evils they had borne, if they had been permitted to do so.

I can imagine nothing better calculated to produce an impression upon men's minds, without inflicting any intolerable physical suffering, than the series of miracles recorded upon the occasion. They must have produced disgust, and annoyance, loss of property, and terror, but no such degree of pain, mental or bodily, as to justify the epithets cruel and vindictive ; and it was not till all else had failed, till it was manifest that no permanent impression was made by loathsome or destructive insects, or reptiles, by loss of their cattle, (a most important part of their property) by darkness and storm, nor even by temporary personal suffering, that death itself was invoked, and in one night a tremendous mortality took place among the Egyptians.

Another thing, which is very striking in these miracles, is that they are of the kind which irresistibly lead

men to see and acknowledge the act of God. If they had been beneficent miracles, they might have been attributed to a hitherto unknown degree of human skill ; but pestilence, and storm, and death are produced by causes altogether beyond human control ; and in all ages, nations, and languages, rude and civilized, wise and unwise, have been regarded as proceeding from a superior power.

But it is said that the sufferings caused by these miracles were inflicted upon the whole nation, when it depended solely on the will of Pharaoh, whether the Israelites should go or not ; and further, that God himself hardened the king's heart, so that even he was not responsible for the obstinacy he appeared to exhibit. Without insisting upon the extreme frequency of that use of language called exaggeration, a frequency observable in our own calm Western idioms, and infinitely more so among the excitable nations of the East, by which what is meant of any considerable portion of a people is said of the whole, I would suggest the probability that, substantially, the whole Egyptian nation were partakers in the guilt of the oppression practised toward the Hebrews. Three millions of people are not held in slavery by the government alone, under ordinary circumstances ; and certainly if the Egyptians had been generally willing to let them go, it would not have been easy for the government, despotic though it might be, to restrain them.

As to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, I can scarcely think it necessary to explain what is so clear. I suppose that it is an example of a very common case

in human nature, when men having escaped with impunity, or at least with life, from a threatened or dreaded evil, repent of the tenderness of heart they had exhibited, and return, with returning health and strength, to the very course of conduct which caused their sufferings. I suppose Pharaoh's heart was like other people's; that he trembled at the thunder and lightning and hail, and grew brave again with the restored serenity of the sky. It was by this change of circumstances that Pharaoh was emboldened; and as God produced the change, He is said in Scripture language to have "hardened Pharaoh's heart." Who, that has watched his own heart, has not experienced feelings very like those of Pharaoh? And who, that has experienced them, ever thought that the Almighty was responsible for our use of the lessons He gives us? It is a very strange sort of justice, it seems to me, that would absolve Pharaoh, and arraign God in his stead.

There are two considerations which ought to be mentioned in this connexion, to account for what might seem the astonishing blindness of Pharaoh. One would think a miracle conclusive proof of the interposition of God. But Pharaoh had never heard of Jehovah, except from Moses; and probably, heathen and idolater as he was, thought that was only a name the Hebrews had given to their object of worship; and it remained to be seen whether the God of Israel or the Gods of Egypt were the most potent. Especially was he led to hesitate, when he saw the miracles of Moses imitated by the wise men, or rather the jugglers he had about him. In the East the jugglers, at this

day, are wonderfully skilful, and it seems to have been, from the earliest times, a favorite amusement to witness their performances. Every monarch of every petty tribe has his band of expert performers, and it is not improbable that the custom has descended from the very days of Pharaoh. Even when the sorcerers were unable to imitate the miracles of Moses, they would probably consider and represent him only as a somewhat more skilful artist than themselves; and the convincing character of the miracles would thus be, in a great measure, lost upon Pharaoh, from the doubt that would be thrown over them. It is not, therefore, surprising that it required the most alarming mortality among the Egyptians, combined with the entire preservation of the Israelites, to produce a real and effective conviction, in the mind of Pharaoh, that it was necessary to let the Hebrews go.

When, at last, the Egyptians were satisfied that their slaves could not be retained, they were eager and urgent for their departure, and it would seem, hurried them away, with presents and loans of valuable articles. The Hebrews thus became possessed of some degree of wealth; but they were unorganized, unarmed, ignorant, cowardly, and of servile habits. They were about to undertake a perilous journey to the land of their fathers, as they were told, and although they did not know exactly how far it might be, yet they did know that they were quitting a land of plenty for the wilderness; that they were leaving their means of subsistence to seek a greater prosperity in what was to them a strange country. I can scarcely imagine a

position of greater difficulty than that of Moses, considering it in a worldly point of view alone; and the manner in which he effected his object is worthy of the highest admiration, whether it were the result of divine or human wisdom. I cannot, indeed, believe that any human being, without direct divine aid, could have accomplished what Moses did, but if any one can believe that, it should, in no degree, lessen the high estimate that ought to be placed upon his achievement.

Having thus stated my general conviction that divine aid was necessary for the accomplishment of this great work, I do not think it important to say precisely what particular deed, or fact, was miraculous, and what was not. When the limits of the natural and supernatural are so difficult to trace, and the language of the narrative may be interpreted in either way, it is quite as well to leave others to explain for themselves, as to insist upon one's own interpretation.

It may, perhaps be regarded as an unfortunate circumstance that the language of scripture should appear thus equivocal, and represent what, in many cases, are natural circumstances as the act of God. But, as I have already intimated, I consider the language of the Bible as decidedly the most just and philosophical. Natural events, as they are called, are no less God's doing than supernatural ones. They are only less striking, less powerful in their effect upon our imaginations. But when they are of a striking and peculiar character, what impropriety is there in speaking of them as God's acts? If the east wind did cause the waters of the Red Sea to subside, so that the Israelites

passed over the head of that deep bay without being incommoded, who made it to blow? And who, by changing the direction of the wind, brought back the waters, and overwhelmed the Egyptians? Was this preservation of one party and destruction of the other any less the act of God, because He used the instrumentality of a natural cause, the wind, to effect it? Surely not. And so of all other interpositions of Providence recorded in the Bible. Some of them may have been produced through the agency of nature, as it is called, but there are others which are unequivocally miraculous, and it is no less natural, than it is proper, to speak of all as the acts of God, and to acknowledge His power, as the *disposer of events*, in all that happens in the world.

The miracles of Moses in the wilderness are of a different character from those which he had performed in Egypt; and are, for the most part, of the impressive and beneficent kind, which serve at once to establish authority and relieve suffering. Food was provided for the hungry, water for the thirsty, and the power of the Almighty was exhibited to confirm the evidence of His wisdom and beneficence, and to impress upon the ignorant, the thoughtless and the perverse the necessity of obedience to His law.

And now I wish to observe, for a moment, the character of that law, and compare it with other systems of morals and religion, which have been prepared by man's wisdom, and sanctioned by no higher authority than that derived from human institutions, or human ingenuity.

Moses was the first, and before the Christian era, the only person, who ever distinctly taught the doctrine of the immateriality of the Deity. And it is to be particularly remarked that he taught it in the midst and in spite of the universal prevalence of idolatry in the East. However strange it may seem to us, that men should worship the work of their own hands, yet nothing is more certain than that it has been the most common result of the unenlightened religious principle. Men must worship something; and when not better instructed, it seems to be a natural impulse to worship an image, either of man himself, or of some other creature, or natural object, by which man is greatly benefitted. It is very difficult to prevent those who have been taught the doctrines and principles of Christianity from falling back to the worship of images and pictures; and all Catholic Europe is filled with paintings and statues that are deemed to have peculiar sanctity and power, and are worshipped as much as the idols of Egypt, or Canaan, or Hindostan, or China. Even Moses himself, the first authorized teacher of God's immateriality, could not altogether divest himself of the persuasion that God must have a form; for on one occasion he besought Jehovah to "show him His "glory," i. e. His person. The ingenuousness of this confession is at once honorable to the integrity of Moses, and the most convincing proof that he could not have invented, or by his own wisdom have discovered the doctrine of an immaterial and omnipresent Deity. Observe too, in confirmation of this assertion, the wonderful beauty and perfection of the representations

which Moses gives of the appearances and words of Jehovah. In his first interview he saw a light, and heard a voice, but discerned no figure. He was alone, in the open field. The tricks of impostors are performed before crowds, in darkened buildings, and with mystery and preparation. But how simple, unaffected, and on the supposition of its truth, how natural is the account !

The customary token of respect among the Eastern nations is taking off the shoes ; and that Moses should have omitted this, and should have been required to do it, is a proof of the unexpected nature of the call, of the natural confusion of surprise, and of the ignorance of Moses of what was to follow. Did he invent this circumstance afterwards, and insert it in his narrative to give an air of naturalness to it ? He would have been much more likely, if he had been making up a cunning falsehood, to have represented himself either as familiar with the Deity, as other fabricators have done, or else as instantly impressed and overpowered with a sense of the divine presence, and rendering, of himself, the homage called for by the solemnity of the occasion. I look upon that little circumstance as one of the happiest possible proofs of the truth and perfect honesty of Moses. But, if he had invented it, I confess it seems to me impossible that he, or any other mortal, in like circumstances, could have invented what follows. Moses asks by what name he shall designate the being who sends him to his countrymen, and the sublimest words are uttered, in reply, that have ever been recorded : “ Thus

"shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."

God is the only being whose existence always has been, and always will be *present*. God *is*. And this was true before aught was created, and will be true though all else should perish. There is no other being who, at any point of measured, or unmeasured time, can still say, I AM. No other words can convey this idea so briefly, so perfectly, so sublimely. Was it an invention of man? Was this devised by one who was surrounded by idolaters, and had never heard the name of Jehovah? If it were, it was as much a miracle as if God indeed spake to Moses, and it is immaterial whether it be regarded in one way or the other.

Moses was also the first who taught distinctly the unity of God. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." Polytheism had been, and to this day continues to be, the inseparable companion of idolatry, and adds to the absurdities from which the Israelites were delivered by their inspired lawgiver. It seems to be, in some sort, the natural tendency of the human mind, at least in weak and ignorant individuals, to believe in a plurality of superhuman beings who have power over the conduct and the destiny of men; witness the fabled deities of heathenism in all ages; the legions of patron saints of the Catholic church; the belief in demons still prevalent in the reformed churches, and the extreme difficulty with which even enlightened persons renounce the belief of the influence of Satan, Beelzebub, or whatever the principle of evil may be called. The

doctrine of the Trinity, by which the divine essence is divided into three persons, with different characteristics, is an exemplification of the same tendency of human nature. The application of the word person, at all, to Him who fills all space, is a mere specimen of the imperfection of human ideas and language, and is never applied to God in the scriptures. He is there spoken of as a being, not as a person having a definite form; and it would be well, in all cases, to use the scriptural mode of speech in relation to Him. The immateriality and unlimited presence of the Deity are quite as important attributes as any that must be ascribed to Him.

Against the tendency of human nature, exhibited in his day by the universality of the opposite doctrine, and ever since, by its prevalence over by far the greatest part of the globe, Moses taught the unity of the Deity. What shall we say of this? Is it human wisdom, or divine inspiration? "Canst thou by searching find out "God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto per-
"fection?" If so, why was he not found out by others beside Moses? The inference is irresistible that the wisdom of Moses was more directly inspired than that of other men,—that he had what he professed to have, authority to speak in the name of Jehovah.

The omnipotence and omniscience of God are the deductions of reason from His power of creating and sustaining the universe around us. He was proclaimed by Moses, and by him alone, as the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

The moral perfections of God, His justice and mercy, are every where spoken of, are reiterated with ear-

nestness in every part of the writings of Moses, and are taught no where else but in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and in writings the spirit of which is derived from them.

Another distinction between the law given by Moses, and those systems which rest on merely human wisdom for their authority, is the control which is prescribed by it over the mind, the source of actions good or evil. There are two of the ten commandments which have especial reference to the dispositions of the heart, and which are peculiar to the Mosaic dispensation; or rather, which distinguish it from all heathen rules of morals and religion, the fifth and the tenth. And I wish you to observe the relative position of these commandments, and their beautiful reference to those which immediately precede them.

The first four commandments prescribe the reverence which is due to God, the creator of all things, and the father of all that he has made, and which is due to the day which is sanctified to Him, to the contemplation and worship of His perfections. We are then enjoined to honor our father and mother; not merely to obey, and do them outward reverence, but to *honor* them, to feel in our hearts that respect which will make obedience easy, and all outward demonstrations of regard natural. He who cultivates this feeling towards his earthly parents, will scarcely fail to acquire it, in a still higher degree, towards his heavenly father, who sustains the same relation to parent and child. The next four commandments prescribe rules for our intercourse with our fellow men, and are followed by one enjoining that

disposition of heart which will ensure obedience to the others. He who covets not, will neither commit murder nor adultery, will neither lie nor steal. Other law-givers have thought it enough to forbid, under certain penalties, actual transgression ; but Moses requires the heart to be under control, and to be kept pure, in order that the actions and the life may be so in truth. Who taught him this better knowledge ? Surely, He only who made the heart, and gave man power over himself.

The institution of the Sabbath is another of those evidences of wisdom, and of the knowledge of human nature, which is peculiar to the law of Moses. Accustomed as we are, in this country, to the religious observance of one day in seven, it is difficult to appreciate the influence of that observance. It is quiet, unobtrusive, constant and cumulative. The habits of one generation form the character of the next, and it is only by a sudden reversal, or change of such a habit, that we can discover what and how much to attribute to its influence. Of one thing, however, we cannot fail to be sure, viz : that the effect of the Sabbath, as a day of rest from labor, and of religious and intellectual reflection, is good, greatly good ; and that the loss of such opportunities would be productive of injury, of which, though the amount may not be weighed with accuracy, yet the character cannot be doubted.

There is no evidence that the seventh day was a day of rest, before the time of Moses, nor among any other people than the Hebrews in all antiquity. Was it by mere accident, or by careful reflection, or by divine authority, that he devised an institution so exactly and

admirably adapted to the wants of man, to his improvement in all stages of moral and intellectual and religious progress, and at the same time to the necessities and the convenience of his physical nature ?

The promulgation of a code of moral law at all is a most striking and peculiar circumstance. Where else, in the history of antiquity, is it to be found ? What man ever devised a system, or assumed the authority to proclaim it to his nation as of binding power ? Wise men have stated, sometimes, the results of their reflection in the form of rules of conduct ; but one or two of these only are ascribed to an individual. There is nothing like a system recorded any where as the production of one man ; and Moses alone, of all the great men whose names are handed down to us, ventured to call his rules *a law*. What gave him, a modest, retiring man, of no commanding presence or eloquence, such confidence in himself ? And still more, what enabled him to effect his object, and to give his law the sanction of divine authority ? Nothing, it seems to me, can account for the successful establishment of this system, in opposition to all the tendencies of the age, and of all previous ages of the world, and in most direct and pointed opposition to the vices which are especially likely to beset an enslaved and oppressed people, but the substantial truth of the assertion that “ God spake ‘ these words.’ ”

Another circumstance, which marks the difference between a divine and a human law, is that, in the latter, the sanctions are all of a specific and determinate character. For a violation of a given law there is a pre-

scribed and definite punishment; the only discretionary power being with the judge, to increase or diminish its severity within certain limits, according to the aggravation of the offence. But it is not so with the moral law of Moses. Not a punishment is hinted at. It is deemed enough to know that God has given the rule. He has always the means of enforcing it. And it is one of the striking peculiarities of this dispensation that the omniscience and omnipotence of Him who spake from Sinai's awful mount are appealed to as the sufficient sanction of its paramount authority. The true character of the Deity is thus implied throughout; and it is the only religious system existing, or which has ever existed, in the world, of which this can be said. Christianity, of course, goes side by side with it in this respect.

Now what is the inference from this? Is it not that unassisted human reason is insufficient for these things? If not, why have not other wise men, with whom every nation has abounded, made some approach towards similar discoveries? Why was it reserved for a nation, and an individual who, in no other respect, appear to have been beyond their age in knowledge or wisdom?

I know not how these considerations may affect others, but to my own mind they have a weight which there is nothing to counterbalance. I rest, therefore, with firmness in the conviction, which I hope may be produced in you, that Moses was divinely commissioned to establish, among his people, the knowledge and worship of the only living and true God, whom to know and to obey is life eternal.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CEREMONIAL LAW. THE INVASION OF
CANAAN.

Besides the law of the Ten Commandments Moses promulgated two other codes, intended particularly for the government and the distinction of his own people. These were the police law, as it may be called, prescribing fixed punishments for certain offences, and the ceremonial law, with which the remainder of the book of Exodus, and the whole of the book of Leviticus are filled.

It has often been objected to these systems that the one was unnecessarily severe, and even cruel, and the other excessively burdensome. But it seems to me that these objections are made without due consideration of the character and circumstances of the Hebrews. Systems should be judged by their suitableness, or unfitness, for the people for whom they are prepared; and not by an abstract standard, or by their adaptation, or want of it, to a totally different state of society. That which might be cruelty in one case is only reasonable caution in another; and that which would be burdensome and odious to one people may be particularly pleasing and useful to another. Certain it is that the Jews themselves never complained of the severity or Troublesomeness of the laws of Moses; and

it is clear that the necessity of constant attention to the prescribed rites, and splendid ceremonies, of their religion, kept alive in them the memory of the better things, the admirable precepts and doctrines every where appearing throughout the whole series of the works of Moses. Undoubtedly it was necessary, in the rude condition of the Israelites, that the laws, by which their intercourse with one another was governed, should be of some severity, as it would be accounted among more refined and delicate nations ; and unquestionably, also, the establishment of an imposing ritual was essential to their preserving any vestige of the doctrine and worship they were selected by God to maintain. Notwithstanding all the pains taken with them, they frequently relapsed into an absurd idolatry, and it is scarcely conceivable that they should ever have been reclaimed from it, but for the wise severity of their inspired lawgiver, and the judicious ceremonial he imposed on them.

Many things, moreover, appear in this age of the world, of a harsh character, which were then a great improvement on the usages of contemporary nations. A very striking instance of this is the regulations which were made by the law of Moses respecting the “avenger of blood,” and the “cities of refuge.” Lev. 25. By these rules the revengeful practices of other nations, and of the Jews themselves, were very much mitigated and restrained ; and harsh as they seem now, they were, in fact, a very wise provision on the side of mercy. The law of kindness and benevolence pervades the whole of the writings of Moses, descending

to the care even of the inferior animals ; and it is very probable that if we possessed a little more knowledge of the practices of other nations of those days, we should perceive the better provisions of the law of Moses in many points.

But it may be asked, as it has been asked with a sneering and triumphant assurance, if this law has divine authority, why was it not perfect at once ? Why talk of improvements upon former practices merely, when God might have given a perfect rule ?

In reply, I would ask the man who knows the constitution of human nature, whether a perfect rule, if promulgated, would have been likely to have produced a better or greater effect, whether it would have produced so great an effect, as one which was but a little in advance of the actual condition of men ? Mankind must be led on by easy stages in the path of improvement ; and rules which may be abstractly perfect (if such a phrase be admissible) will often be laid aside, and totally disregarded, when one, only better than those previously in authority, would have led to a decided and acknowledged reform. This too is the general, almost the uniform course of Providence, who produces changes gradually when it is intended they shall be permanent, and of wise men, who seek to imitate the course of the Omniscient, so far as is possible.

The next book, Numbers, brings the history down to the eve of the invasion of Canaan by the Israelites, and contains an account of the military force and arrangement of the nation, and several changes in the code of civil and ceremonial law. Some new provisions are also

introduced, and many rules are given, to take effect after their settlement in the land of which they were going to take possession. A list of the various journeys, and places of encampment, for the forty years since the departure from Egypt, is put on record, and every thing is as definitely arranged as possible for the contemplated invasion.

There is nothing more striking in this part of the history, than the internal evidence of its having been written at the time of the occurrence of the circumstances recorded, the wisdom of the preparations for the great event about to take place, and the manifest change in the character of the people. They were no longer the timid slaves escaping from masters, the dread of whom alone was worse than the dangers they anticipated, and fleeing from every little tribe of enemies that chose to attack them. A new generation had arisen that knew not Pharaoh, and that had acquired in the wandering, and probably pastoral, life which they led in the otherwise thinly inhabited regions they had passed through, the strength of mind and body, the boldness and the discipline essential to the success of the national enterprise.

The character of this enterprise itself has been made a ground of objection to the claim of Moses to divine authority. It is not to be supposed, it is said, that God would sanction the unwarrantable expulsion of divers nations from their homes, nor the various cruelties which were practised upon their enemies by the Israelites. Here, again, is an instance of the impropriety of judging of that which took place under certain

circumstances, by rules which are applicable only to others. It does not appear that the Israelites practised any degree of cruelty which was unusual in their day, whatever might be thought of some of their acts at present; and unless they had conducted the war in the manner, and with the degree of rigor, expected by their enemies, and practised by them, the Israelites would have been exposed to the consequences of imputed weakness, the courage of their opponents would have been roused to bolder action, and it would probably have required still greater severity to subdue them.

The only reasonable question, then, is whether the war, by which they possessed themselves of Canaan, was justifiable in its origin. In the absence of all history of the inhabitants of the country, we are left very much to conjecture, or rather a judgment of probabilities, in relation to many of the circumstances of the case. And, first, I cannot but consider it very probable that the claim of the descendants of Abraham to the territory in question, was known, if not acknowledged, by the people of that and the adjoining countries. It could scarcely fail to be known in Egypt, where it would naturally be spoken of with the deepest interest by both parties, the master and the slave. And it is clear that when Moses asked permission for the Israelites to depart three days' journey into the wilderness, it was perfectly understood by the Egyptians that they were not to return. Else, why their reluctance to let them go?

It is so obviously impossible for three millions of

people to wander in thinly inhabited regions, without being heard of by the neighboring nations, that it seems scarcely necessary to adduce evidence that such was the fact. But in the second chapter of Joshua, Rahab, an inhabitant of Jericho, is stated to have said that the history of the Israelites was well known, from the time they left Egypt, and that the fear of them had fallen upon the inhabitants of the land. These people had, therefore, abundant warning of the approaching invasion, and were, doubtless, informed of the ground assumed by the Israelites to justify it. As we never hear of this claim to the inheritance of the country being disputed, it is no unfair inference that it was not denied, and was admitted to convey a legitimate title. I think, at least, it is very strange, if the claim were considered unreasonable, that nothing of the sort is recorded as having been said by the Canaanites. If they chose to resist such a claim, sustained by such a power, neither they, nor others for them, can complain of injustice.

But besides, this is a case to which, in my judgment, the principles, of which I spoke in the beginning, apply. Does it follow, that because it appears wrong to one who sees its bearings very imperfectly, it really was wrong? Shall we set ourselves up to judge the Almighty? Even if we presume so far, why select this instance in particular? How does the case differ from that of other conquests seemingly unjust?

Let us not forget that God has infinite resources to compensate in every individual case, for any apparent, or even real, injury; and that we are totally unable to

determine that such or such an event ought not to have been permitted. On the other hand, we can very often see the retributive justice which orders circumstances in such a way as to punish the guilty, reward the righteous, and demonstrate the equity of the Creator. Thus we have the ground of a reasonable presumption that, in cases where the proof is less clear, the difficulty lies in our powers of perception, rather than in the character of the Deity.

The story of Balaam, which is told in this book, throws some light on the subject; and proves conclusively the extent of the reputation which had preceded the Israelites, for their numbers, their power, and the divine protection afforded to them. Balaam was, doubtless, an impostor; but his admissions in this instance, are good evidence of the facts to which he alludes. "God brought them out of Egypt," he says; and if this event, which had happened forty years before, were commonly known, why not the other circumstances of their extraordinary history? And how could the Canaanites have been ignorant of the claims of this formidable people to their territory? If they saw fit to resist such a claim, of which they did not deny the validity, and which was supported by so obvious a display of power, both human and divine, they surely should submit to the consequences without complaint. There is also abundant reason to believe that the sins of these nations were righteously punished by the calamities which overtook them; and thus, again, the providential justice of God would be fully vindicated.

The conduct of this invasion, however was not entrusted to Moses. His great age, as well as the character of his mind, which, though in the highest degree vigorous, was not of a military turn, and all his habits of life, arising from early education, and later experience, rendered him less fit for this portion of the mighty enterprise than a man who, having grown up under different circumstances, had not yet passed the prime of life. Joshua was therefore selected to be the commander of the military force of the nation, and the general leader of the people in all respects, in short, to be the successor of Moses.

Towards the close of the book, we are told of his appointment and separation to the office, with some degree of ceremony ; and upon him afterwards devolved the direction, not merely of military affairs, to which he was already somewhat accustomed, but of those miscellaneous matters in which Moses had heretofore been the guide and governor.

Before resigning his office, however, Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy, or the repetition of the Law, in which the most important points both of the law, and of the national history are briefly recapitulated. It contains, also, the most earnest exhortations to obedience, the most eloquent expositions of the penalties of disobedience, and advantages of fidelity to the law of God, and concludes with a strain of poetry and a benediction worthy of the peculiar interest of the occasion.

CHAPTER V. CHARACTER OF MOSES.

Having thus completed the work that was given him to do, Moses ascended a mountain, and there died in solitary seclusion. "No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." Thus wisely, solemnly, and poetically ended the career of a man whose memory is destined never to perish, but who must be regarded, intellectually, morally and politically, as one of the greatest lights by which God has chosen to conduct men to virtue and to true wisdom.

Let us look back a moment on his life, and see what he effected. In the first place, I do not hesitate to call the revolution, which he produced in the condition of his countrymen, the greatest on record, considered merely politically. What are the triumphs of an Alexander, a Cæsar, or a Napoleon, at the head of armies of brave men, and contending with those who were confessedly their inferiors, compared with the deliverance of a nation of seemingly helpless and spiritless slaves from the dominion of powerful and warlike masters? What are the conquests that glitter in the eye for a little while, and then pass away and are forgotten, compared with the permanent establishment of a new nation among the powers of the earth, a nation that could scarcely fail to produce great effects not only upon their neighbors, but upon the character of the world? Where is the record of any thing like it? There have been such things as servile wars, in-

surrections that have terminated, or perhaps begun, with a general massacre of one side or the other. But in the liberation of the Israelites there was no war; there was nothing that, with any propriety, can be termed insurrection. It was an emigration, not only with the consent, but at the urgent demand of those most interested to detain them. Who ever heard, either before or since, of the sudden migration of three millions of people, and those people slaves? Who ever heard of masters urging their slaves to quit them? And when was it known that such slaves established themselves in another land, and there continued to flourish for centuries, as an independent people?

The adaptation of institutions to the character and circumstances of the people for whom they are designed, and to the condition of human nature in general, is usually considered as proved by their permanence. If subjected to this test, there is nothing as yet known in history which is equal in length of duration to the institutions of Moses; no moral law, no religious truth, which has produced so great an effect upon the most intelligent of the human race, as the law and the doctrines of the Hebrew scriptures. Their influence has been extending, irregularly, but certainly, from the time of their promulgation until now; and I cannot but think that if Christianity had never existed, the law of Moses and the truths which he taught would still have endured, to save the world from the absurdities of paganism and the horrors of superstition.

The follies of the East, of China and India, in religion and morals, may claim, though they cannot

prove, an antiquity as great as that of the law of Moses; but what is their present condition? Are they not tottering to their fall? Does any one believe they will survive the attacks of the more civilized race, who are now exerting so powerful a moral and political influence in those peculiar regions? Can the absurdities of Chinese idolatry, or the more barbarous superstitions of India, be propagated from age to age among other races than those in which they gradually arose? It is manifest that though such monstrous doctrines may be fastened upon men in particular districts, under the combined, progressive, influence of ignorance and early impressions, yet they cannot be considered as adapted to the mental and moral wants of the universal human race. The general intelligence of mankind will revolt against such stupendous folly.

But when has the progress of refinement, or of intelligence, rendered it necessary to supersede the Decalogue, or to abrogate the institution of the Sabbath? After more than three thousand years of experience in their favor, I think we are authorised to predict that they never will be supplanted by any thing better adapted to lie at the foundation of all moral and religious progress. It is to be expected that, from time to time, men will arise, as they have appeared in past ages, who will, in the plenitude of their presumptuous wisdom, speak with little reverence of that which is taught by the Jewish scriptures, and which they could teach so much better. But it is equally to be expected that such vanity will meet with small sympathy in the breasts of the mass whom they address, and that all future pre-

tensions of the sort will fall into the speedy oblivion which has overtaken those of the times that are past.

There is another point of view in which I wish to present Moses to your minds, and that is as an author, or writer of history, combined with instruction in morals and religion. Recollect that his five books are the earliest work which has come down to us from distant ages, and that it is written in a language long since disused as a living tongue, and which, notwithstanding the great labor bestowed upon it by many able scholars, is very imperfectly understood, and you can hardly fail to look with astonishment upon the wisdom, the knowledge, the acquaintance with the human heart, the sagacity, and the energy of the writer, which cannot but be seen shining through all the imperfections of the language, and of our acquaintance with it. What a beautiful simplicity! What brevity, yet what completeness! Every thing which is necessary for his purpose is told; and nothing superfluous, nothing which would be without interest or value to his countrymen, is inserted. For eloquence, too, and exalted poetry there are few works of any age which can be compared with this.

It has been said, to be sure, that the discoveries of modern science have overthrown the record of facts as stated in the beginning of Genesis; but, as I observed before, I think much more has been said on this subject than has been substantiated. It does not appear, to my own mind, that there is any discrepancy between Moses and modern philosophers, so far as I am acquainted with the facts discovered, or believed,

by the latter. And it is hardly possible there should be any material disagreement. The account of Moses is given rather to declare the substantial, all important fact that "in the beginning God created the Heaven "and the earth," than to explain the manner of doing it, or what is called in modern times, the Theory of the Earth. The main fact is not, and cannot be, affected by scientific discoveries ; and the less important details, so far from being overthrown, are in truth, wonderfully corroborated by many of the researches of modern days. In view of all these things, it is impossible not to ask, "Whence had this man this wisdom "and these mighty works?"

It may, perhaps, be said, in reply to this question, that he obtained from the Egyptians the knowledge, wisdom, and skill which he displayed. If this were to be admitted, then it must also be admitted, that he very far surpassed his instructors. What monuments of their wisdom have they left to succeeding ages ? What impress have they fixed upon the character of the civilized world ? Of their skill in the arts, both useful and ornamental, there are unquestionable proofs ; and so, in all probability, would there have been in other departments of improvement, if they had made proficiency in them. But so far from that is the fact, in all the records of antiquity there is no people so distinguished for what may fairly be called stupidity, and extreme folly in their religious notions, as the Egyptians. No other people worshipped beasts and birds and insects, as they did. No other people ever imagined that, by preserving the dead body, the life of the

soul could be restored on earth. These two facts, alone, are conclusive as to the mental cultivation, the philosophy, the *wisdom* of the Egyptians.

All their learning consisted in acquaintance with the principles of some of the mechanic arts, and with the practice of those designated as fine arts, architecture, sculpture, painting and music. Of their poetry we have neither specimen nor record. So that I cannot but remark, that when we leave material objects, and examine the Egyptians in the more intellectual departments of cultivation, we have no evidence whatever of their having made any memorable advance; and in religion and philosophy, they were really behind their own times. Astronomy is the only difficult branch of knowledge which they are reputed to have cultivated with some success. And even in that, their progress can scarcely have been very great, destitute as they were of instruments necessary for its successful study. If Moses had been a great mechanic, or painter, or juggler, his Egyptian education might have been useful to him; but what sort of place was the court of Pharaoh to make a lawgiver, the father and founder of a nation, the teacher of truth in religion, and morals and philosophy? Would the worship of a beetle, or a bull, lead him to the knowledge of the true God? Would the institutions of Egypt, the oppression practised by one class upon another, and which all combined to exercise upon his countrymen, teach him those excellent rules of justice, and forbearance which appear in his law? Who gave him his insight into the human heart, and taught him to adapt his institutions and his precepts to the condition

of his brethren ; not to leave them without sensible emblems, and yet teach them to regard these emblems as signs, and so wisely to mingle ritual observances with religious meaning, and intellectual cultivation, as to make a monument that shall last as long as mankind, and will always command the admiration of the wisest of the race ? No, these things, and the wonders that he did, in the political creation, as it were, of a separate people, are not to be accounted for by his acquaintance with the learning of so idolatrous and unintellectual a nation as the Egyptians. Nor can they be explained upon any other hypothesis, as it seems to me, than that he was taught of God how to effect these great purposes ; in other words, that he was inspired,

CHAPTER VI. INSPIRATION. MIRACLES.

You will ask me how you are to understand the word inspiration ; and the answer involves great difficulty, but one the overcoming of which enables us to vanquish all the other difficulties that arise in the perusal of the scriptures with comparative ease. I will endeavor to explain to you my own ideas on the subject, and if they seem to be well founded, I hope they will give consistency and firmness to your views ; that they may veer neither to unreflecting superstition on the one hand, nor to cheerless incredulity on the other.

Nearly every one who has arrived at the years when the labors and cares of life press heavily on the heart and the understanding, (a period I can scarcely suppose you to have reached, but which, in the natural course of life, is soon coming to you all,) has found himself sometimes looking anxiously round for relief, under difficult circumstances, puzzled, embarrassed, or it may be, even distressed. Suddenly an idea occurs to him, which has the same effect upon his mind and spirits, as it would to have a bright light shed over a dangerous path, which was, just before, covered by dark clouds that were hurried along by the wind, and were terrifying him by their threatening aspect. He sees clearly the point at which he is to aim, and the path by which he must reach it. Certainty takes the place of doubt, calmness is restored to his thoughts, and courage to his heart. The idea comes to him he

knows not whence nor how. The effect he feels, but the means by which the effect is produced are not disclosed to him.

In such a case, the worldly man plumes himself upon his sagacity, and the laborious man upon his patient consideration, the skeptic rejoices in the fortunate hit, and the devout man thanks God for his aid. Which of these is right? Which is the truly wise, as well as good man? Surely not he who is content to praise himself alone, as if he were the unaided source of his own success. He neither made himself, nor placed himself in the situation he occupies. He did not create his own powers, nor did he make the idea which has relieved him. Why then should he be proud of a result which was not exclusively of his own achieving?

Still less is he wise, who, because he does not perceive the means by which a result is produced, denies their existence, and attributes to chance, or accident, that which can be the effect of nothing but intellect, knowledge and power. Chance is not a power, and can therefore produce no effect. The signification of the word is, merely, that we do not perceive the rule according to which the result is produced; not that there is no rule, and no power which acts by rule, but merely that we know not what it is. And it would have been as wise for an astronomer to have said, five hundred years ago, that the planets revolved by no fixed law, because he had not discovered it, as for us to say that any event occurs without design, because we cannot perceive the mode in which the designing power operates.

The only other alternative is that the relief was given by the suggestion to his mind, of the idea which was so important, by a power which knew his position, sympathized with his trouble and was willing to relieve it. That power is God. He may act by the intervention of other beings ; but this is immaterial, for if He do, He made them also, and they must obey His will ; and whether the effect be direct or indirect, mediate or immediate, it is still “ God who works in us to will “and to do of His good pleasure.”

But the devout man is as ignorant of the manner in which that idea was conveyed to his mind, as the skeptic, or the worldly man can be. He does not know whether it came in obedience to some general law which would have operated upon every human being in similar circumstances, or whether it was a special application of a general rule to his precise character and wants, or whether it was given him as a reward for his exertions, or in answer to his prayers. Whatever he may think, he has no ground for knowledge, that this mercy was vouchsafed to him in any peculiar manner. He will not therefore claim any superiority over his fellow men, nor make any pretensions to superior advantages of intercourse with his Maker. But he will at the same time be sure, that this interposition, whether it was brought about in a peculiar manner or not, still came from God, as its ultimate source, for there is no other power from which it could have been derived. He will believe that God has blessed his efforts ; and he will know that if he had not exerted himself, he would not have been in the way of re-

ceiving this blessing. He has put himself in the way, and has been rewarded.

Here is the combination of his efforts to do his duty, and the mercy of God to sustain him in it. He is not therefore without reliance upon his own exertions, any more than the skeptic or the wordling; but he looks, with thankfulness, beyond and above himself, for that which he could not have effected alone.

Many men have probably experienced something like what I have described, and many more would have observed it, had they been attentive to their course of life and thought. I am firmly persuaded, myself, of the interposition of the Almighty in the affairs of men in this, and other ways; as for instance, in raising up a man like Washington, or Napoleon, who is a blessing or a scourge to a large portion of his fellow creatures; in leading us by some trivial circumstance to avoid or incur a great calamity; in the infliction of disease, or the restoration to health. Now all these interpositions occur in the common course of events, and though they come from God, yet they are not what is understood by inspiration, or by special, visible divine favor or displeasure. They so much resemble them, that have I thought it would help you to just ideas to use them in illustration.

In the great events of the world, such as civil or natural convulsions, we can scarcely resist the instinctive impulse to acknowledge the finger of God; and in the secret recesses of our own hearts we shall often perceive it, if we attend to the course of circumstances; and notwithstanding the danger of our becoming fanci-

ful, or superstitious, or falling into that odious fault of religious pride, I think it is a spirit to be rather encouraged and cultivated. It leads to thought, reflection and observation, and inclines us in all things to adore "the ways of God to man." All the danger of this turn of mind may be avoided, by the recollection that we *know* not the truth; we have no right, therefore to presume that God watches over us with peculiar care, or communicates with us in any peculiar manner. At the same time, I have no doubt that God has communicated with individuals of our race, in an especial manner, and has given them the right to say, as Moses did, " Thus saith the Lord."

If this be so, if any men have ever been authorized to speak in God's name, we naturally wish to have proof of the fact. The mere assertion by an individual that he is God's ambassador is not enough. Every roguish intriguer, or fanatical enthusiast, may do this, and thousands have done it; and imposed the most absurd and pernicious dogmas upon their deluded followers. How are we to distinguish between these and the men who are really sent from God? There is but one way in which we can discern the true from the false prophet, and that is, by finding the power of performing miracles, of a suitable character, on suitable occasions, or the inability to do so.

You will observe I say miracles of a suitable character. It is not every violation of the usual laws by which God governs the world, that could be regarded as a proof of inspiration. If a man without any religious, or other important motive, were to make a com-

pact mass of lead float on the surface of water, or throw a stone into the air, and suspend it at a given height, these performances would clearly be violations of the laws of nature, but would have very small tendency to convince me that he was sent from God. There must be something more than a mere wish to surprise and astonish. There must be an object which is in itself worthy, an occasion which shall justify an appeal to superhuman power, and a suitable display of such power.

I will take for an example, the smiting of the rock in Horeb, by Moses, and the gushing out of the water to save the perishing nation. Here was an object in itself worthy, viz : to save the lives, and relieve the sufferings of such a multitude. Then the opportunity was admirable. All natural means of supply had been sought in vain, and gasping thousands were watching every action of Moses with the eagerness of hope, and the agony of suspense and physical pain. And, lastly, there was clear manifestation of a power beyond that of Moses, or any other man, over physical agents. No one ever heard, before or since, of a rock being parted by a gentle tap of a rod. It is a thing contrary to the nature of the several materials. Yet it was done in confirmation of the claim of Moses to divine authority. Here are all the circumstances which I esteem necessary to constitute a miracle a proof of authority ; and the authority of Moses was, accordingly, confirmed in the minds of his contemporaries, and of succeeding ages and generations of reflecting men, by this and similar works.

But there have been those who have taken the ingenious ground, that miracles are intrinsically incredible, i. e. that there are no means of proving them to have been performed at all. We have experienced, say they, the falsehood of men, and we cannot believe them ; we have experienced the fallibility of our own senses, and we would rather doubt even their testimony than believe in a violation of the laws of nature. Those laws are immutable.

There is just such a mixture of truth and falsehood in the grounds of this argument, as renders it specious, and somewhat difficult to answer ; and yet we have an instinctive persuasion of its fallacy. Doubtless we have experience of the fallibility and falsehood of ourselves and of those about us. A great many errors are propagated, some by design, and some by mistake. But do we, or ought we, therefore, to distrust all that is said to us that is new or strange ? A man would be generally considered stark mad, who would, on such ground, refuse his belief to that which he himself had witnessed, or to that which was strongly testified to by a single individual of good character. Circumstances generally, if not always, indicate when the testimony is good and credible, and when it is the reverse ; and to refuse to believe a man who for many years has borne a good character, and was in a situation to know that of which he testifies, merely in consequence of the general knowledge we have of the fallibility and falsehood of human nature, would, in my opinion, be as little consonant with philosophy, as it is with religion and common sense.

The next position to be examined in the argument I have stated is, that the laws of nature are immutable. What is the authority for this assertion? Simply that the individual experience of the assertor has witnessed no variation of them. If human testimony be inadmissible, to the point of occasional variations of the law, it is equally inadmissible to the proof of the permanency of the law, and the evidence is thus brought down to individual observation. I trust that what I have before said of the imperfection of human powers, and the modesty which it becomes us to exercise in relation to them, will satisfy you that little confidence ought to be placed in an argument which rests substantially upon the assumption that they are all sufficient for the absolute determination of a very difficult point. Who has told these men that the laws of nature—to speak more properly,—that the laws of God are immutable, in respect to the physical world? Who has told them that He who made the rule, never could change, or modify it, in the slightest degree? Certainly not the Maker of it and them. They pretend to no direct instruction from Him. It is, then, simply their own deduction from their observation. Does this entitle them to say that there is an intrinsic incredibility in miracles? Perhaps an extended, or more accurate observation of the working of the laws of nature would have led them to a different conclusion. Have they remarked, or do they know the causes of all events? Do they know that the diseases which appear, prevail for a time, and then disappear for an interval, are the results of the regular operation of fixed

laws, or of a violation of them? Do they know that the upheaving of a mountain, or the depression of a continent is the result of a law, or of its violation? Do they know that the series of revolutions which have taken place on this globe, took place because any general law required them, or in consequence of a special interposition of an overruling Providence.

Astronomers have discovered that there is a very great probability, that a planet once revolved in an orbit between those of the planets Mars and Jupiter. They looked for it, and expected to find it. According to the general laws appearing to regulate the distances of the planets from the central sun, there seemed a vacancy, a gap in the succession of the heavenly bodies. They found, at last, not one planet revolving within the limits of the ecliptic, but four small ones, with orbits more eccentric than those of the other planets, not in the plane of the ecliptic, but revolving at such angles, as would bring them at opposite nodes, within that plane; so that there seemed a very great probability that one planet, proportioned in size to its neighbors, had been broken up into four parts, which had continued to revolve round the sun, but in a different manner from that in which what may be called the parent planet had revolved. I think the probability of this is so great, that it may be taken for a fact. At least, it may be so considered, for purposes of argument, till it has been proved to have been impossible. Now who shall say that the laws of the planetary revolutions are immutable? Here was a planet having a given period, broken into four parts with different

periods. Who can say that the same may not happen to Jupiter, Mars, or the earth? Does any man know that nature's laws are so immutable that it cannot happen, and that he will not believe an astronomer who shall tell him that Mars has suffered the same fate? Whoever discovers such self confidence, will betray more vanity than wisdom; and so, in my judgment, does he who says, "a disease cannot be cured by a word, but requires the use of remedies; and I will not believe, if it be told to me, that a disease has been so cured, nor even if I think I see it myself, for testimony is fallible, and my senses may deceive me; but the laws of nature are uniform." They may be uniform; but no man knows within what limits they are susceptible of modification, for reasonable and wise, though, it may be, inscrutable purposes.

No, if there be any inherent, intrinsic incredibility in miracles, it is only incredible that human power alone can perform them. That the being who made the law, should have the power to modify, or even reverse it, is not intrinsically incredible. It is no more, in itself, incredible that God should make the sun go back, or the moon stand still, than that He should originally have made them go forwards. Such a statement may be, and ought to be, believed upon such evidence as would convince us of any other hitherto unobserved phenomenon. No matter how vast may be the changes in the universe we may suppose must necessarily ensue from such an occurrence. The same being who made all worlds and the laws by which they are governed, can modify, change or destroy the

whole. Let us not set limits to a power the extent of which we do not know, and cannot measure.

The next question that arises is—if miracles are susceptible of proof, is there sufficient evidence that they have been performed? The Christian says yes, unhesitatingly. For the proofs I must refer you to the Bible itself, and to those treatises which have been written on this subject. It is an extensive, and very interesting inquiry, upon which I cannot enter in these brief notes, and which has been treated far more ably and satisfactorily than I could expect to do it.

You will find, if you agree with me in the views I have presented, reasonable ground of belief that miracles have been performed by various persons, but particularly by Moses and by Jesus Christ, as proofs of their divine mission. They appealed to these wonderful works as such proofs, and they are, as I have said, the only sufficient proofs which can be given of divine communications to men. If no miracles have ever been wrought, then we have no satisfactory evidence that there has been direct communication from God to man; and those who have pretended to perform them, instead of being, as all their other acts would make them seem, very excellent, as well as wise and intelligent men, were the greatest impostors the world has ever seen. They were nothing better than rash, presumptuous liars, appealing to their own displays of false miracles, for the strange, and on this theory, unaccountable object of cheating men into obedience to the highest moral law. The very man who said, in

the name of Jehovah, “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” is found to be the most treacherous and false of his race, if he lied in this matter. The very man who said, “Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see,” referred John to impositions upon human credulity, if he did not give sight to the blind, and raise the dead, as well as preach the gospel to the poor.

And for what purpose did these men, whom it strikes me as so absurd to charge with falsehood that I have scarce patience to write the word,—for what purpose is it to be supposed they assumed this position so inconsistent with every other part of their character? Think you that the life of Moses, during the last forty of his hundred and twenty years, was an object of envy? Do you suppose he was happier than when he tended the flocks of his father in law? Or do you suppose he could not foresee the troubles he was bringing upon himself, and like many other ambitious men, was disappointed in the object of his pursuit? The natural tendency of his ambition, according to the ordinary calculation of human motives, would have been to distinguish himself in the court of Pharaoh, as his great progenitor Joseph had done; and after defeating the wise men of Egypt, it surely would not have been difficult for him to do so. But he preferred leading forth his enslaved countrymen to freedom, toil, danger and poverty, to revelling in all the comforts, luxuries and elegances of royal favor. Was he ambitious? Yes, but it was of true greatness; not to shine by deceit, to

be branded in after times as an impostor, but to lead his people, and all who should know their history, to the knowledge of God, to virtue and true religion.

And what possible motive can you imagine to have influenced Jesus Christ to pretend to a power it was not given him to exercise? What did he gain by it? What could he gain by it? Was not every ordinary motive which governs selfish men against it? Did not his preaching and his miracles combine to lead him into all manner of misery, reproach, pain, persecution, and, at last, to death? Could he not have made friends of his enemies by a precisely opposite course, and have gone through life in splendor and power? Doubtless, but then he would, indeed, have beeen an impostor. Then he would have saved himself, others he could not have saved. Then, instead of having his name exalted above every name for righteousness and perfection, he would have been a vulgar deceiver, of whom there are thousands upon record.

The inconsistency of this charge of falsehood with all else that we know of the characters of Jesus and Moses, strikes me as fatal to the theory of ancient and modern unbelievers in miracles. If these wonderful works have never been performed, then the best, wisest, greatest men the world has seen were, *at the same time*, the most perversely wicked, and the weakest and most foolish of mortals.

But I will not pursue the argument, I will take it for granted that you are satisfied, either by this view, or by the accumulation of evidences you will find elsewhere, that miracles have been wrought; and will pro-

ceed to point out what they are designed to prove and do prove.

On this subject it will be necessary to guard against the very opposite error to that we have been considering. It has been the misfortune of the Christian world to believe for many ages, and a large portion of them believe now, that the miracles recorded in the Bible, prove that every word in it is the dictate of inspiration, and thus that the Deity is responsible for the whole. The most unhappy consequences have flowed from this error. Words have been interpreted strictly which were not designed to be so understood; and authority has been ascribed to language which was never intended to have it. I have already mentioned some of the peculiarities of the language of the Bible; and how great is the difference between the modes of thought and speech contained in it, from those in use among us. You will recollect, therefore, that *there are peculiarities* in the modes of speech which we find in the Bible. These various books, then, are not, throughout, well adapted to the understanding of all men. The same phrase will be often understood very differently in the East and the West; and the manners, customs and peculiar circumstances of climate, which are familiar to the writers, and are constantly referred to, will not be understood at all in other regions. This does not seem to me to be characteristic of language which would be selected by the omniscient Creator, for writings of universal authority. Observe the language of the Decalogue, and of Christ's moral precepts, which unquestionably are designed for universal

application. Is there any doubt about their meaning ? Does not a Hindoo understand as well, and in the same sense as an Englishman, the divine precept, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, "do ye even so unto them?" It seems to me rational to believe that if every word in the Bible were a direct emanation from the divine mind, it would have been as universally intelligible as these. But such is not the case.

Again, a similar and still stronger argument is to be drawn from the different character of the several books. They were all written by Orientals, but not by the same mind ; and it is very remarkable what a prodigious diversity there is in the character of those minds, as exhibited in this collection of writings. Can any thing be more striking than the difference between the works of Moses, for instance, and the writings of David ? Were ever any two men more unlike than Isaiah and Solomon ? Shakspeare and Lord Mansfield, Walter Scott, and Bacon do not resemble each other less. And the inference seems to me irresistible that the individual minds of the writers, and they alone, were concerned in the production of these various works. There is not the least disagreement, or inconsistency in the moral and religious principles, the doctrines, and precepts of the several authors. In these things, which were intended to be of universal authority, they are all agreed ; they are perfectly intelligible to every human being, of every clime and age, who is endowed with common faculties ; but in every thing else, in all which characterises the individuals,

and the race to which they collectively belong, they differ from one another, and from the rest of mankind ; they are intelligible to some, and unintelligible to others ; their modes of speech will lead their neighbors aright, and will mislead, as they have misled, those who have interpreted them without reference to their peculiarities. Now, if every word were the dictate of the Almighty, I cannot conceive that all this should be so. The whole would then as clearly and evidently be the work of one mind as the Decalogue, and there would be no imperfection, no mistake in the least detail, any more than in the most important doctrine. All would be intelligible, and might be relied on with safety. None of us would be misled under any circumstances, and it would be as plain that the work could not have been produced in any other way, as it is that the external world could not have been wrought by human hands, or minds.

Compare the acknowledged work of God in the physical creation around us, with the Bible. In the whole vast universe we know of no inconsistency or imperfection. Every leaf of every tree and flower, inconceivably numerous as they are, is finished with a minuteness of perfection and beauty which is scarcely appreciable by human faculties. There is nothing so insignificant as to be neglected, nor so vast as to be beyond the grasp of omnipotence. Every grain of sand is weighed and polished by the same hand that balanced and illuminated the sun. If every word in the Bible were divine, there would have been the same minute accuracy and perfection observable as in the

works of nature. This is far from being the case. There are numerous imperfections, inconsistencies in minor details, slightly different representations of the same events, and many similar discrepancies, which, while they do not in the smallest degree impair, but greatly confirm the general credibility of the whole, if regarded as human productions, are yet conclusive to my mind, against the verbal inspiration of these several works. God has never elsewhere left such imperfections in His works; I cannot believe He would have done it here.

The reverse of this argument has been maintained, and it has been held that as there are imperfections in the world around us, and as the course of Providence seems, sometimes, at variance with perfect justice, therefore imperfections were to be expected in matters of revelation; and it is no proof that a revelation has not been made, that it does not seem to us perfect, any more than it is a proof that God did not make the world, because there are imperfections in that.

In order to explain in what manner both arguments may be sound, I must call your attention to the meaning of the word perfection. There are two kinds of perfection, positive and relative. Positive perfection is the attribute of one being alone, God. Relative perfection, i. e. perfect adaptation to the place designed for it, and in which it is found, may be, and as I maintain, is the attribute of every created being. An unorganized mass of stone is not certainly a perfect being, but it may be, and I believe it to be perfectly suited to the place it occupies in the world. In this

limited sense it is perfect, and it is in this sense I use the word in the argument above stated. Every planet is perfectly adapted to its sphere, every animal to its element, every herb and flower to its climate, every drop of water and every grain of sand to the ocean, or the shore, of which it forms a part.

But it may be said, plants decay and animals die. Is this perfection? Yes, if they be designed to do so. And the perpetual succession of generations, and change in the position of material things, so far from being an imperfection, is one of the splendid wonders of creation, and probably both animals and plants improve faster by succession, than if the life of the individual were prolonged.

But they suffer. How can this be consistent with perfection? With absolute perfection, like that of God, it cannot be reconciled; but there is nothing incompatible with it in the idea of relative perfection which I have endeavored to express.

But they are unequal; and how can two individuals, of whom one is superior and the other inferior, be both perfect? Perfection and equality are very different ideas. Perfect adaptation is entirely consistent with immense differences. The sun is not more perfect as a centre, than the planets are as revolving bodies. The smaller flower of a colder climate is as perfect, in its place, as the more luxuriant growth of a warmer region. The savage man of the desert is suited to his sphere of action, just as perfectly as the most refined inhabitant of "the garden of the world." Now if the sun were made to whirl around the planets, or if the rice plant of

southern savannahs were found struggling with the cold and the drought of northern hills, or if the young Bedouin were to be made to change places with the student of Oxford, according to ordinary, or frequent, arrangements of God's providence, there would be inconsistency, want of adaptation, imperfection in his works, which might lead us to expect such in his word. But as long as every thing in nature is perfectly adapted to the end designed, and as long as falsehoods and mistakes are not found in the works of God, my argument is that we ought not to attribute them to the Almighty in what is called "His word." "His word is truth;" and whatever is to be found in the Bible inconsistent with strict truth, whether in the assertion of fact, or in religion or morals, must be ascribed to the men by whom the books were written, or to the imperfection of human language, but not to the divine mind.

"God spake these words and said, Thou shalt "have no other Gods before me." This and all that follows in the Decalogue is not only admirable in itself, but is consistent and beautifully adapted to the nature of the beings to whom it was addressed, and singularly suited to the whole of the circumstances under which it was spoken. But did God also say, "They are corrupt, they "have done abominable works, *there is none that doeth good?*" No, it was David who said this; and even he, certainly, could not have meant that it should be construed literally, for it is inconsistent with all those passages in the Psalms, and they are many, which imply the existence of the righteous. Yet this and similar texts, which are, as I think, simply

poetic exaggerations by human authors, have been regarded as the “word of God,” and as such have been made the basis of religious doctrines. Self contradictions are not to be attributed to the infinite God, though they may be, with propriety, ascribed to David and other men, however holy ; and may even be accounted among the beauties of language not intended to be used with philosophical accuracy.

It would seem probable, also, that if God designed to save these books from every imperfection, He would have done the same with the character of their authors, in order that they might not, in after times, be a subject of reproach upon the truths and doctrines they taught. But Moses and Solomon and David, and Peter and Paul were guilty of grave faults of character and conduct, and the traces of them are by no means imperceptible in their writings. This does not strike me as consistent with the doctrine of an all controlling inspiration.

Once more, this doctrine asserts a divine agency which was entirely unnecessary. The common faculties of human nature are quite sufficient to record, and publish any doctrines, precepts, or facts which can be impressed upon the mind. No matter whether they be derived from study or inspiration, from research into God’s works, or a direct communication from Him, whatever the human mind can receive, it can communicate. So true is this, that it is a common maxim among intellectual persons, that one who does not communicate ideas clearly has them not well de-

fined in his own mind. The proof of having clear ideas is the intelligible development of them.

There is no difficulty in imbibing the great doctrines of the existence and perfection of God, the accountability of man, and the future state of rewards and punishments; nor in comprehending the rules of moral action which are prescribed to us in the Bible. I conceive, therefore, that there was no need of a special interference of God's providence to secure that which was perfectly safe without it. If Moses understood what God communicated to him, he was able to teach others without a verbal inspiration of his writings.

And further, this inspiration was not only unnecessary, but it would have been totally ineffectual, without the continued supervision of every copyist of every book. It is a matter of demonstration that there are verbal errors in the Bible, arising from the carelessness of scribes, and sometimes even from wilful alterations by designing men. Of what use was the minute inspiration, then, if the very first copyist was left to his own intelligence, integrity and care? When it can be shown that there have been no blunders in copying, or translating the scriptures, and no interpolations into the original text, the very reverse of which is demonstrable, then, and not till then, can I believe the doctrine of a verbal inspiration of those books. If I were to explain to you the modes of writing anciently in use, the very great imperfection of the manner of describing sounds by forms, especially in the Hebrew language, in which very few of the vowel sounds had a written representative, you would perceive much more

strongly the great force of this argument. Indeed I look upon it as quite a sufficiently wonderful proof of the watchfulness of God over the important truths contained in these books, that no more serious errors have crept into them. The errors in detail prove that they are not the writings of God, properly speaking ; the general accuracy of statement, in things important, proves God's care of the great doctrines contained in them.

The sum of the whole matter is, that we are to read the writings of prophets and apostles with the reverence which is due to the productions of men who were inspired, for the most important purposes which can be imagined to affect the character and happiness of the human race ; men who knew that they were inspired, for they could work miracles ; and whose characters, though not rendered perfect, were yet elevated, strengthened, and purified by intercourse with their Maker, and their Saviour, with God, and with Christ. But there is no reason to regard them as any thing more than records, assertions, and teachings of inspired men. The men were inspired, not their writings. To suppose otherwise is only to degrade the character of God to the level of the imperfection manifested in these books. Nothing can make them faultless, and the only effect of regarding them, in the strictest sense, as the word of God, must be to justify the sneer of the atheist, who tells us the God whom we worship is an imperfect being, and cannot protect even His own works from error.

You will, perhaps, ask what is the meaning of the

passage in St. Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy, which reads thus in our English Bible, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." This seems an express declaration that the Bible is, word for word, what God spake; and it has been, and is so understood by many and many a devout and excellent Christian, who has faithfully and earnestly endeavored to reconcile this assertion with passages which did not seem to show divine wisdom or knowledge. Let us consider it a little, and perhaps I can satisfy you that the text means nothing like what has been supposed.

I will first transcribe the verse immediately preceding, which reads thus—"From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Jesus Christ. All scripture is given," &c. The first thing I remark in the whole passage is, that the word scripture is used as a translation of two different words in the original Greek. The English word has, in our day, and I believe that it had at the time the translation was made, acquired a peculiar, and as it were, technical meaning. By scripture, or the scriptures, we always mean the Bible; and we never apply the word to any other writings whatsoever. The Greek words, for which it is given, had no such restriction upon their meaning; and simply meant writing, or writings, in general. In the first instance, in this passage, the word holy is used to designate particular writings; but in the second case it is not, and if

the translators had given the literal, and I will add, the true meaning of this single word, they would have said—"from a child thou hast known the sacred writings," &c. "All writing," or "Every writing is given by inspiration of God," &c. But this would have been going a little farther than any body could have supposed St. Paul to mean;—St. Paul, who was acquainted with the literature of several languages, doubtless, as he was educated a Pharisee, at Jerusalem, spoke in Greek at Athens, wrote in Greek to the converts to Christianity in Grecian cities, and preached in Rome, where he had the rights of a citizen. He could not but have been familiar with Grecian and Roman literature. He quoted a Greek poet in his harangue to the Athenians, and he must surely have known that not all the literature of Greece and Rome was divinely inspired. In order not to make St. Paul utter such an absurdity, our translators put the word "scripture" in place of "writing," thus misleading multitudes of mere English readers.

But what writings were those which St. Paul calls holy? Certainly not our Bible, as it stands, for it was not then collected together, nor was it even all written. The very letter which he was writing at the moment to his pupil Timothy, is now included in the scriptures, and of course St. Paul could not mean to refer to that. He must have meant, then, the lawgiver, prophets, and devotional writers of the Hebrews. And if he had even intended to say that all these were divinely inspired, I think he would have used a different form of expression. "Thou hast always known

"the sacred writings, which are able to make thee wise to salvation through faith in Christ. They were given by the inspiration of God," &c. What would have been more natural? But instead of that he uses another word, to which he does not prefix the epithet sacred, or holy; and my inference, and that of many able scholars, from this circumstance, as well as from the construction of the sentence in the Greek, without a substantive verb, is that he intended to express this idea, "all writings which are inspired by God," or still better, "Every writing which breathes the spirit of God is profitable both for doctrine," &c.

You see, now, how very different is the true meaning of this passage from what it would appear to be on first reading it in our English version, how important it is to attend to all the circumstances that can be discovered to elucidate what is perplexing, and how very important carefully to avoid translating a word of general signification by one of a restricted or technical meaning, as well as the reverse. I have dwelt the longer on this phrase, because it is a very striking instance of a fault which is frequently to be found in our translation, when by a seemingly unimportant or justifiable variation of the meaning of one word, a very essential alteration is made in the idea that will be conveyed by the sentence, especially to unlearned persons. "Scripture" may, to the scholar, be a synonyme with writing. It comes from a Latin word which simply means any thing written; but to the mere English reader, scripture means something very different. The absurdity of asserting that every writing is inspir-

ed is so glaring that there must be some way of avoiding the imputation upon St. Paul. Our translators avoided it by changing the signification of a word. Better scholars than they have avoided it by a more natural construction of the sentence.

I have also dwelt on this little passage at some length, because it affords a very good illustration of some of the most important principles of interpretation adopted by Unitarian scholars. You will perhaps see the charge brought against them, as it has often been, of perverting the meaning of the Bible, altering the phraseology, and thereby the sense. But you perceive, in this instance, and it is reasonable to infer that the same is true in others, that they alter it because it has been previously perverted ; that they endeavor to bring it back to its true signification, in the first place, by examining into the meaning of each word ; secondly, by comparing one text and one passage with another, especially in its immediate neighborhood ; thirdly, by inquiring into the bearing of known circumstances attendant upon the condition of the writer, illustrative of his probable meaning ; and fourthly, by never imputing absurdity to a respectable author, when it can be avoided by a legitimate, and still more, if by a far preferable construction of the sentence.

Let us now proceed with the notices of the character of the remaining books.

CHAPTER VII. HISTORICAL BOOKS.

The books which follow immediately after the works of Moses, in our Bible, are twelve historical productions, relating to very distant intervals in the history of the Hebrews, written by unknown authors, and at unknown periods. It is clear that most, if not all, of them were written long after the occurrence of the events recorded, when the boundaries of truth, and traditional fables had become somewhat uncertain, and difficult to trace; and they possess therefore a very different degree of authority from the works of those who recorded their own actions, or events which they had themselves seen or heard. They differ also very much from each other in the degree of care and intelligence displayed in their compilation; so that the same arguments against the verbal inspiration of these books may be used, with still greater force, than against that of other classes of works in the Bible.

But if not inspired, they are very venerable and valuable for their antiquity, their general accuracy and their style. They are next to the writings of Moses in antiquity. We have nothing else, in relation to the early history of any people, which is comparable to these fragments for the remoteness of the period to which they refer. On this account alone, even if they contained nothing but traditions which we could not believe implicitly, they would possess an inextinguishable interest. But when we compare them with the histo-

ries of the early periods of other nations, we find they are remarkably free from follies of that sort. There is really very little that need disturb us, or that will raise a doubt of their general accuracy in fair minds. Look at the early history of Greece, or Rome, or of Eastern nations. Fictions, and absurdities and impossibilities so abound, that one can hardly find a single point on which to rest, in toiling through the chaos of nonsense. There is scarcely any thing that suggests an explanation of the strange incongruities that are so multiplied, or that can be reconciled with subsequent facts. Not so with the early history of the Hebrews. In these books there is little which is either obscure, or of doubtful character. The greater part of their contents is natural and probable; and if it had not been for the unfortunate claim, brought forward by other persons than their authors, to divine inspiration, they would be regarded with much more respect and reverence than they usually are. But the ridicule which has been heaped upon this claim, by unbelievers in revelation, has extended its influence over the records themselves, and has produced a confusion in the mind which renders it difficult to do justice to them as human productions. Regarding them in this light only, I think no one can fail to be struck with the great merits of these books; as first, their many touching and beautiful exhibitions of true refinement, and delicate affection, of which specimens are seen in the story of Ruth and Naomi, of the attachment of David and Jonathan, and in the lament of David over his rebellious son Absalom. These exquisite touches of nature

are unsurpassed—nay, that is little to say—they are unequalled, unapproached by any thing, with which I am acquainted, recorded in the early history of other nations. The stories, or the poetical fictions of Greece and Rome, the *Pylades* and *Orestes*, the *Nisus* and *Euryalus*, are insipid and coarse compared with these true exhibitions of real nature. This very superiority of the Hebrew writings is one proof of their truth; for imagination has never yet reached the height of reality. God created our nature, man invents fables.

Secondly, these books abound in proofs of sagacity, acquaintance with the weakness and depravity of human nature, which are as striking and true as the examples of its beautiful impulses. See, for instance, the rebuke of David by Nathan, the interviews of Elisha with Naaman and Hazael, and many others that are equally profitable for “correction and instruction in righteousness.” And here I will remark that nowhere, in the literature of any other people, do we find such constant reference to right and wrong, the principles and the obligations of virtue. There are crimes enough recorded in the history of all nations, but where else were the rebuke and the punishment of crime recorded?

This is a distinction of the Hebrew literature from that of every other tongue, that deserves something more than a passing remark, or acknowledgment. It is fundamental and inestimable. Every thing seems to have been written, whether history, poetry, prophecy, or proverb, to illustrate the advantage and beauty of vir-

tue, the disgrace and deformity of evil deeds. Every record of character and conduct points out its right, or its wrong. Every precept is given to inculcate virtue, and every promise and every threat is directed to the encouragement of the upright, and the terror of evil doers. Throughout the whole of the Hebrew literature, whether esteemed canonical or not, there is one continued series of lessons in virtue, and warnings against vice and crime, both by precept and example, exhortation and threat. And it stands absolutely alone in this its glory.

The literature of other languages is devoted to a thousand other objects, some valuable, and some trifling, and some injurious ; but that of the Jews is exclusively given to the highest good of which we are capable, improvement in virtue. How often is it the case, that the most brilliant works of gifted minds have been the very reverse of improving ! How often does it require virtue in the reader, not to be seduced by the attractive pictures of vicious pleasure, or interesting though degraded character ! There is not a literature, ancient or modern, eastern or western, northern or southern, in which such pernicious works may not be found ; and the best that can be said of any other than the Hebrew literature is that it may innocently amuse, or instruct the people for whom it was prepared. But there is not a book, no, nor a sentence in any book of ancient Hebrew literature, the design, or calculable effect, of which is to make men worse, less pure or upright ; and there is scarcely any thing the design of which is not to make men better. There is no want

of interest either. Nowhere are there finer delineations of character, nowhere more beautiful stories, nowhere more sublime poetry than in the Hebrew scriptures. But all has a moral and a highly religious tendency ; and if men are not made better by the perusal of it, it is their own fault and not that of the books.

I do not mean to be understood to say that the moral and religious views of the authors of these books were perfect ; but that they were established upon right principles, and were immeasurably superior to those of the writers of other contemporary nations, and of all, whether earlier or later, who have had no knowledge of the works of Moses. The influence of these works we trace on every page of the historic authors. None of them attain his terseness, or his sublimity ; but his general style of thought was obviously familiar to all of them, his habit of referring all events to God, his views of the character of the Deity, and of the duty of the nation and of individuals. That all these were imperfect may be true, but so probably are our own views of God's character and of human duty. We must not pretend to have attained perfection in this any more than in other things. Our means of knowledge and reflection on these subjects are better than those of the Hebrews, and so were theirs better than those of any other than Christian people. If God should vouchsafe to give the world another revelation, it would, doubtless, lead us onward in our knowledge of Him and of our duty, in some way adapted to the then condition of mankind, or at least make it more clear and certain ; but it would not, and could not, render

Christianity, any the less a divine revelation, nor in any respect or degree diminish its value, that new and wider views should hereafter be developed. Just so with the Mosaic dispensation. Christianity led men on in the path of duty and religious knowledge, but did not diminish the value, or authority, of that portion of truth which had been previously taught. On the contrary, our Saviour himself says, that “one jot or one ‘tittle shall in no wise pass from the law.” The imperfection, or rather the incompleteness, of its effect upon men’s minds and characters is not, in the smallest degree, an impeachment of its divine origin. It is to be expected that writers, warriors and others, even with this law to guide them, should fall into occasional errors of theory and practice. Wonderful indeed would it have been, if they had not. And to require that every writer, and every eminent person, under the Hebrew dispensation, should be without error and without reproach, is as extravagant a demand as can easily be conceived. Yet this is, in fact, the argument of the unbeliever. Because David sinned, and the Israelites became idolaters at times, because their historians made mistakes, and sometimes gave us tradition for truth, because Moses did not reveal a future life, and represented God in His character of judge more than in that of father, therefore the pretensions of the Hebrew legislator are all false, and the value of his law, and of the history of its effects is reduced to nothingness. No, not so; let not the errors, or the wickedness, of men be made an argument against the character of God, nor the limited effect and extent of a

revelation be regarded as evidence that there has been none.

If the historic books of the Old Testament be not inspired writings, they are still of the highest interest and value, as human records of human conduct; and if some things are stated which it is difficult to believe, we must recollect how little there is of this character, and study the points of history, or of geographical, or statistical knowledge which will elucidate much that is obscure, or doubtful.

With regard to the miracles recorded, at intervals, throughout the long period of about a thousand years, to which these books relate, I shall leave you to judge of each by the principles I have laid down, and shall let you decide for yourselves upon their credibility and importance. If the transaction seem to you to have occurred in a manner worthy of God, and the occasion appear a suitable one for the exertion of miraculous power, you will place a corresponding reliance on the account. If otherwise, you will attribute the error to the imperfection of humanity, and not to that of the Divine Being. I doubt not you will avoid both the mistake of the unbeliever, and that of the superstitious believer, who ask, if you cannot rely upon every word, how can you select that which is true from that which is false?

The question is easily answered, and such selection is made, every day, in the interpretation of the writings of our contemporaries, as well as of those of remote times. We say such an assertion is probable and we believe it; in such an other declaration, the judgment

of the writer was affected by previous prejudice, and though he means to be correct, yet we cannot esteem him perfectly so; in such another assertion, he has suffered his wishes, his hopes, or his fears to deceive him, and he must be altogether mistaken. Nothing is more common than such reasoning about the best, the most honest and intelligent writers; and I see no objection to our exercising our judgments upon the Jewish historians in the same way. It is not necessary, in order to sustain their general credibility, that every word should be strictly, literally true, in one sense only. It is required of no other ancient writers; why should it be of these? Livy and Herodotus are not considered as altogether unworthy of credit, though they do tell us fables; nor is it very difficult to separate the probable from the improbable in their accounts, and to rest with a satisfactory confidence on what appears true and rational.

I should scarcely have thought it necessary to say a word upon this point, were it not for the singular circumstance of the same reasoning being used by opposite parties, to produce results which seem to me equally irrational. The too credulous believer tells you to take the whole as the inspired word of God; that you have no right to put any glosses or interpretations upon it, in order to make it seem reasonable to your mind, and that all study is therefore unnecessary and improper; you must take it as you find it, and if it seems to be nonsense, you may call it a mystery, but must not undertake to determine whether it is probable or improbable, true or false. The incredulous

man on the other hand says, too, you must take it as you find it, and if there be any absurdity in it, you cannot believe that it comes from a perfect being, and you must reject all that pretends to be from God, and yet is mingled with imperfection.

In both cases the argument is pushed too far. We must understand things, not always as they appear to us at the first glance, but as they seem after the exercise of our intellectual faculties and powers of research upon them ; and then, perhaps, what was foolishness to us at the outset, may become in our eyes, the perfect wisdom of God. To the superficial observer the Ptolemaic system of the universe seems the natural and true one ; and if it were a matter of religion, he would accuse of impiety, as has actually been done, any one who might be disposed to argue against its truth, from the number and size of the worlds supposed to revolve around us, or upon any other ground however strong. But it is obvious that the exercise of our reason and reflection is as much a religious duty as it is the dictate of the understanding, and that he is not true to himself who will attempt to believe an apparent absurdity, without explanation, either in religion, morals, or physics. Neither is he wise who, satisfied of the impossibility, or extreme improbability of what has hitherto been believed, contents himself with denying every thing, and calling all events, of which he does not understand the order, chance. “ My senses have deceived me, he says. I am satisfied the sun does not revolve round the earth ; but the motions of the heavenly bodies are an unravelled labyrinth. It is all confu-

"sion, there is no order about it, and no man can see "or prove any system. The universe is an accidental "collection of atoms, which will one day be accident- "ally separated. It is impossible to prove the contra- "ry, and therefore I cannot be convinced that there is "either system or designer."

A little patient observation and reasoning would have taught him that though his senses may deceive him to a certain extent, there is good reason to trust them, notwithstanding; and that a thorough investigation of the intricate, but not inexplicable, motions of the heavenly bodies, would bring forth the most splendid and delightful proofs, not only of design, but of power and beneficence inconceivable yet universal. It is with the word as with the works of God. Absurdities may be believed for a time, and provoke an incredulity which is as unwise as superstition; but reason and reflection will ultimately bring truth and beauty, and infinite goodness out of seeming folly, or cruelty, or neglect.

You will observe that the miracles recorded in the historic books of the Hebrews, subsequently to the time of Moses, have this important distinction from those mentioned in the first five books, that they are not recorded by those who wrought them, or witnessed them. They are spoken of as matters of past, and sometimes of long past history, and ought to be examined by the rules of evidence applicable to such documents. I do not say this to throw doubt upon them, but to put you upon the exercise of your reason in respect to them. Some of them are surely not unworthy

of belief ; and if, in regard to others, you think it more reasonable to believe that a highly poetical expression, or a simple exaggeration, has been converted, by too literal an interpretation, into a record of miracle, you impeach no one's veracity by so believing, and you throw no doubt over the general accuracy of the history.

The character of the people, as delineated in the detached portions of their history which have been transmitted to us, was a very peculiar one. Men of right minds, well instructed in the law and precepts of Moses, and wisely resolved to pursue the course pointed out in them, appear to have been mingled with a large, and sometimes preponderating, portion of perverse and ignorant persons, who constantly prevented the effects that would naturally have arisen from union ; while the obstinacy of character for which both parties were remarkable, tended to preserve the recollection, and at least partial observance, of the institutions of Moses, and at the same time, to exhibit in the strongest manner the dangers to which those institutions were exposed. Perhaps the perpetual controversies, political and religious, which took place among them, were, on the whole, favorable to the preservation of the works of their lawgiver, of both kinds. Certainly it was better that there should be disputes, than that a nominal observance of the law should have gone on, with the indifferent acquiescence of the nation, till the gradual progress of abuses should have covered over the whole, and its memory have perished in the excess

of Pharisaical observances, or the sterility of Sadducean unbelief.

For many generations after their successful establishment in Canaan, under Joshua, they seem to have been in a state of great anarchy, perpetually suffering from the hostility of the former inhabitants whom they had permitted to remain, and without union among themselves, and therefore without power to subdue their ancient foes. It is a very striking fact, that though the history of the reigns of Saul and David, the first monarchs, is given with more detail than that of any other portion of a thousand years, yet not a word is said of the political means by which the nation was consolidated, its scattered force united, and rendered respectable, or how, in a few years, they were brought from civil war and confusion, to a hitherto unknown degree of power and prosperity. The personal character and conduct of Saul and David are dwelt on, their political measures altogether omitted; an extraordinary illustration of the tendency of the Hebrew writers to attribute the course of events to the will of God, and to regard it as part of His system of punishing wickedness and rewarding virtue.

The curiosity of the modern world, which is very much limited to the discovery of second causes, cannot now be gratified in this instance, and we must be satisfied with the knowledge of the result only. Certain it is, that in the latter part of the reign of David, and during that of Solomon, his son, the kingdom was flourishing in peace, and wealth, and splendor; while,

both before and afterwards, during the whole, indeed, of the rest of their national existence, they were torn in pieces by domestic factions, assailed by enemies, carried captive into other lands, or reduced to subjection at home. It would have been interesting, and probably instructive, to have had the means by which this result was effected particularly set forth ; but the great lesson of God's moral government is still more valuable, and it is constantly and wisely enforced on every page of the history of the nation, as it is in every line of their poetry, prophecy and law.

Comparing the later works with those of Moses, in this respect, we see another instance of the superiority of that extraordinary man. He recorded every thing that it was important should be known, whether of a religious or a secular character ; and the rate of taxation and the military arrangement of the tribes are mentioned in their proper places, as well as the moral law, and the exhortations to obedience and virtue.

After the death of Solomon, the tribe of Judah was separated from the other ten tribes who had territorial possessions, the tribe of Levi being scattered among them all in different cities, and there were two contemporary kings of the two divisions of the nation. This lasted from two hundred and fifty to two hundred and seventy-five years, when the ten tribes inhabiting the northern part of Canaan, were subdued by the Assyrians, and carried into captivity, from which it does not appear that they were ever restored, in the form, at least, of separate tribes. One hundred and fifty years later, the tribe of Judah was also carried captive to

Babylon, and the organization of both kingdoms, and of all the separate tribes, was effectually destroyed.

After a seventy years' captivity, there was a general restoration of the Jews to the land of their fathers, in the reigns of Cyrus and Darius, who is called Ahasuerus in the Bible; but they never recovered any considerable degree of national power, were perpetually harassed by their neighbors, and were, at last, overwhelmed by the all-pervading growth of the Roman empire. They were reduced to tributary subjection by this remarkable people; and were suffered to remain in their holy land, as long as they did not pretend to an independent government. I shall remark upon the circumstances of their condition, at that period, when I come to speak of the New Testament.

CHAPTER VIII. THE POETICAL BOOKS.

There are two other classes of books, the poetic and prophetic, of which I have yet to treat. The two classes run into each other in some degree, or rather poetry and prophecy are blended in the one, poetry alone is found in the other. The purely poetical books are the five immediately following the historical works, Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

In order to prove, or illustrate, the great merits of these books, it is not necessary that I should attempt to define, with exactness, what poetry is. You know that it is the strongly excited, or figurative language, in which the imagination and emotions delight to express themselves; and which, whatever may be the diversities of taste and cultivation among men, never fails to please and interest all who are capable of understanding it, provided it be adapted to the structure of our common nature. There is a very great difference in the fertility of the imagination, and the strength of the feelings, in different races of men; and it is necessary to study these differences, in order fully to appreciate the merits of poetical composition in various languages, and under very different circumstances. Much that may appear of exquisite beauty and naturalness to an Oriental, may seem turgid or bombastic to one of colder temperament; while the grace and refinement of the

west may appear apathy and insipidity to the warm feelings of the east. But whatever may be the constitutional, or other differences between us and the writers of this poetry, no one, I am sure, has ever read it—no one, I mean, who was capable of poetical excitement—whose heart was not warmed, whose imagination was not stimulated, and whose intellect was not brightened and strengthened by the perusal.

Of the mechanical structure of Hebrew poetry, very little is known with certainty. Two points are pretty clearly established. The first is, that sometimes the beginning of the lines, or, it may be of the alternate lines, or, perhaps, of stanzas, including four, six, or eight lines, was distinguished by the regular succession of the initial letters in the order of the alphabet, giving to the whole a structure somewhat like those pieces in our language, called acrostics. But, whether the lines were divided alike, and were separated into feet of a given length and number, like the poetry of other ancient languages; or whether they were marked, as in modern tongues, by accented syllables, and rhymes at the termination; or whether, like blank verse, they contained a certain number of syllables only, is entirely a matter of conjecture, and must forever remain so, probably.

The other point which is ascertained is, that there is a certain parallelism between the members, whether longer or shorter, of which the poetry is composed; so that the meaning of one clause is, first, either an amplification of that of the other; or, secondly, a contrast to it; or, thirdly, the grammatical structure of the lines

is exactly alike, i. e. nouns, verbs, &c., stand in precisely the same relative position to each other. An instance of the first is the following couplet :

Who is he that loveth life,
And desireth many days, in which he may see good ?

and the following :

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,
And his ears are open unto their cry.

The second description is seen in the following passage:

A wise son maketh a glad father ;
But a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.
Treasures of wickedness profit nothing ;
But righteousness delivereth from death.

The third species is seen in these lines :

The law of the Lord is perfect,
Reviving the soul ;
The precepts of the Lord are sure,
Giving wisdom to the simple ;
The statutes of the Lord are right,
Rejoicing the heart ;
The commandments of the Lord are pure,
Enlightening the eyes.

It is manifest that these forms have quite as much to do with the style of thought, as with that of expression ; and it is a matter of curiosity only whether they have been correctly assigned to Hebrew poetry, or not. But the character of the thoughts themselves is something more than a matter of curiosity ; and it is impos-

sible to read the magnificent and beautiful figures, the pure and lofty sentiments which abound in Hebrew poetry, without admiration and delight; and when to these emotions are added the charms derived from the simplicity and pure piety exhibited in them, they must be regarded as the most valuable specimens of poetical thought which have ever been committed to writing.

The book of Job, though the train of reasoning is not always very clearly intelligible, contains passages of unrivalled sublimity—passages which neither have been, nor can be, in my opinion, surpassed for elevating thoughts and splendid diction. It has been supposed by some, that this is the most ancient work in the Bible, having been written previously to the time of Moses. This idea, however, is inconsistent with the notion I cannot but entertain, of the universality of idolatry, and total ignorance of the true character of God, except among the Hebrews. There are so many just views expressed in relation to God and human life, and their connexion with each other, that I cannot imagine any one to have obtained them before God spake to Moses. We should probably know more of such a remarkable man as the author of this book must have been, if he had acquired all this knowledge in the midst of heathenism and idolatry; and if there were a people, before the Hebrews, who were not heathens and idolaters, who were they, and where did they dwell? No, if the author of this truly great poem were not Moses himself, which is not impossible, (though, I confess, I think it lacks something of the clearness and practicalness of Moses,) it must have been some one acquainted

with his writings and imbued with his spirit. He must have had a powerful and original mind, too, as there is no implicit following of any other person's reflections ; but he strikes out a path for himself, and expresses himself with an energy and power, which have been the envy of all succeeding generations of authors.

There is the same character in it that prevails in all the other sacred books, leading us to the love and the practice of virtue for its own sake, and for its natural consequences ; and it is therefore worthy of its place among the most valuable intellectual and religious treasures of the world.

The next book is the collection of Psalms, or Songs, which are called the Psalms of David—the principal, but not the only writer of them. The word Psalm is not now applied to any compositions but these ; and to many persons it may savor of irreverence to call these productions by so slight a name as songs. But such they are ; they were written to be sung, and not only so, they actually were sung, probably by their author, as well as by those whom he caused to be instructed in music for the purpose. They are lyrics, therefore, in the strictest sense of the word ; and they possess a variety of style, a beauty, and sometimes a sublimity of thought rarely attained in any language.

But it is not the imagination alone that is exercised in these poems. There is not a human feeling, or an emotion of the heart, which is not warmly exhibited in a manner which can scarcely fail to excite the sympathy of those who read them ; and as long as men are sus-

ceptible of love, gratitude, penitence, exultation, joy, or grief, will these delightful compositions be read with the deepest interest. We must peruse them, it should be recollectcd, under great disadvantages. Many figures and illustrations no doubt affect us very feebly, compared with their power over those for whom they were written. We are ignorant of much that would elucidate the beauties of the poems ; and there are some things which are not perfectly adapted to our taste. But enough is left to render them invaluable to us, whether we regard them as poetry merely, or as aids to produce and nourish the highest and best religious feelings.

Only one objection, that I am aware of, has ever been made to the character of the Psalms ; and that is, the apparent vindictiveness manifested in the imprecations against enemies, both personal and national. It is, undoubtedly, a blemish, and should, I think, be frankly admitted to be such, by all who wish to place a just estimate upon the poems. There is no reason why it should not be allowed, if they be considered as the works of a man, and not of God. We expect to find errors and defects in the one, though not in the other ; and however difficult it may be to reconcile vehement denunciation of enemies with the perfection of God, there is no difficulty whatever in accounting for its appearance among the frailties of human nature ; and as long as they are called the Psalms of David, I think he should bear the blame of their defects, as well as receive the admiration which their beauties deserve. In truth, setting the one against the other serves only to

exhibit the magnitude and splendor of his merits as an author ; and scarcely diminishes his claim to our thanks and our love.

As a warrior, David was victorious ; as a statesman, he was eminently successful in consolidating his kingdom ; and as a ruler, he was able to maintain and transmit his crown, notwithstanding many assaults from within and without. He contributed largely, also, to the improvement and civilization of his people in many ways, particularly by his persevering and successful efforts in the cultivation of the arts of poetry and music. The proofs of his genius in the former are before us in his lyrics ; and if his talent in music corresponded at all with that which he exhibited in poetry, he must be acknowledged to have been a man of rare gifts and accomplishments. It will not seem doubtful that he had great talents and acquirements in music, to one who recollects the effects of his harp upon Saul, and the fondness which he displayed for the art during his whole reign. He assembled what we should call, in modern times, a large choir and orchestra, and had them perpetually drilled and practised in singing and playing, for the service of the temple. We are told that he made instruments, by which I suppose is meant that he invented their construction ; and it is evident that he spared no pains, or expense, for perfecting the performances of his band. If he composed the music—as is not improbable—wrote the poetry, and invented the instruments of accompaniment, he must have been a great master ; and a relic of one of his instruments, or a fragment of his musical composition, might be as

good a lesson for us in that art, as his songs are in poetry. Among the many examples of the cultivation of music by the good and the great, it is not unworthy of notice that the best, and I think I must say, the greatest of the Hebrew monarchs, should have been so devoted a patron of the art. It will help us to put a just estimate upon its importance, to find it so much esteemed by men of superior minds.

You observe I speak highly of David's character, both as a man and as a prince; and notwithstanding he committed great faults and sins, I am justified by the language of the sacred historians themselves in this encomium. He is even called by them "the man after "God's own heart." I Samuel, 13, 14. Now this is a specimen of scripture language to which I wish to call your attention, as affording another example of the way in which the Bible must be interpreted, unless we are willing to consider it inconsistent with itself, as well as with all common principles of virtue. Must these words be construed literally, in the meaning which first presents itself to the mind upon reading them; and must we infer that God approved of every act of David's life, and is therefore an imperfect being? Surely, we should not accuse any human being of deliberately approving the wicked acts of David; much less ought we to charge it upon Him who "made man to walk "uprightly;" and it is manifest that whether the above words be inspired, or not, there must be some way of interpreting them less absurd than that. Let it be observed, first, that they were uttered before David's elevation to the throne, and before, therefore, he had been

guilty of those flagrant acts of wickedness which so justly called forth the rebuke of the prophet.

But it may be said, God foresaw what would be his course of conduct, and spoke of the future with the same degree of knowledge with which we speak of the past. Admitting that to be so, I ask again, if God can both approve and condemn the same act, at the same moment? Certain it is, that by the mouth of Nathan, David was rebuked, and that he was punished for his offences. God must then be inconsistent with Himself, and punish what He approves, or those words must have some limitation of meaning.

Let us look at David's character generally, and see if there were any thing particularly deserving of approbation. We find, when he was reproved, instead of punishing the bold messenger of God, as doubtless might have been in his power, he submitted to his rebuke, with penitence for his fault. The next best thing to innocence is repentance; and if we cannot say that David was blameless, we cannot but think him disposed to virtue, though failing, like other men, to be perfect.

Another thing which is very striking in David's character is the union of courage and firmness, with magnanimity, kindness and gentleness, which would be remarkable in any body, but is especially observable in a successful soldier. Notwithstanding the many brutal attempts upon his life by Saul, he refused to take the life of the king, when in his power. And how uncommon a proof of amiability is it, that his dearest friend should have been the apparent heir of the throne

he was himself to mount. There could have been neither guile, nor jealousy in the heart of either of them. Then his care for even his profligate son Absalom, and his touching lament over his death, are singular proofs of his tenderness of heart, strikingly in contrast with the hardness and harshness of those about him. It is manifest that he was far in advance of his age, in all that constitutes refinement and civilization in opposition to rude barbarism.

But perhaps the most important distinction of the character of David, considering the station he was designated to fill, was the firmness with which he adhered, under all circumstances, to the worship and service of the only living and true God. He was never, for a moment, false to his convictions. He was never tempted, or rather, he never yielded to the temptation, like his renowned son Solomon, to relapse into the idolatry of the surrounding nations ; but he faithfully carried out, to his latest hour, the design of the Almighty to perpetuate the knowledge of His character in the world. It was for this that the nation was selected, and established in Canaan ; and it was in this respect that it may with truth be said of David that “ he fulfilled all God’s will.”* Why should he not, then, be called a man after God’s own heart ? If he had not sinned, he would not have been a man ; and if his sin were great, so were his tempting opportunities ; but if he repented,

* It is difficult for us to understand fully the temptation to idolatry in those days, it seems now so very absurd. We can perceive, however, the power of example, and fashion, and ridicule ; and doubtless all were combined to influence the Hebrews. At all events, the inducements to idolatry must have been strong, if such a mind as Solomon’s were seduced by them.

and sinned no more; if he were kind and forgiving even to an enemy, if he were faithful and true, if he were well fitted to lead on his people in the paths of civilization, by the cultivation of the talents and dispositions God had given him, and, above all, if he were able and willing to devote himself to the preservation of the knowledge and worship of Jehovah, the very object of the national existence, methinks it is no great stretch of the language of hyperbole, to represent him as a favorite of the Almighty.

Thus, with rational limitations, and taking into view the Oriental looseness of expression, the language in question is true and proper. With any other interpretation, it is false and dangerous. Exercise your understanding, therefore, with greater care, in the interpretation of the Bible than in that of any other book, for it is of more importance than any other; and adopt as your fundamental rule, never to attribute falsehood or folly to a sacred writer, if by thought, or study, you can find a rational meaning.

The next book in the order of succession is the Proverbs of Solomon; a collection of pithy, sententious observations upon human life and character, intermingled with urgent exhortations to virtue, and obedience to the law of God. This terse and somewhat disconnected style of writing has, in all ages, been a favorite one with eastern nations, and continues to be so at this day. It affords facilities to the memory, which are valuable when the arts of writing and reading are of rare attainment; and there is something in it peculiarly striking to the unlettered person, who sees new

meaning drawn out of words that he uses every day, but has never associated in that wonderful order. It is not surprising, therefore, that the author of so many of these strongly marked phrases should have acquired and maintained a high reputation for wisdom, among a race of men who particularly delight in brief expressions of thought. And we may remark that one of the most common epithets applied to a poet of any renown in the east, is wise or sage. “What saith the ‘sage Locman?’” “Thus the wise Saadi,” are habitual modes of quotation in Persia; and as Solomon far surpassed all other eastern poets in the number of his proverbs, it is natural that he should be accounted the wisest of men. But to this fact is to be added another, which serves to give and to prolong his reputation among all men, and that is, that these proverbs are, in truth, the result and the expression of deep thought, wide observation and profound reflection. It would be happy for us, if, in most of the important transactions of life, these well considered maxims were present to our memory. They would save us from many a worldly embarrassment, and from that which is far worse, many a bold, or heedless offence.

The peculiarity, to which I have more than once called your attention, for which the Hebrew writings are distinguished, is especially observable in this book, viz: the constant reference to virtue and obedience to God as the source of prosperity and happiness. Wisdom means, in Solomon’s writings, not merely a strong, sagacious understanding, but good principles, integrity, religious obedience. “The fear of the Lord is the

"beginning of wisdom." "The fear of the Lord is "the instruction of wisdom." "The path of the just "is as the shining light, that shineth more and more "unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as "darkness." And so through the whole book. Virtue, uprightness, and purity are always represented as true wisdom, as indeed they are. But how different are these views from those which commonly prevail in the world. Success, without regard to the character of the means, is usually considered the sufficient proof of wisdom; and "when the wicked are overthrown," their downfall is ascribed, not to their wickedness, which is its real cause, but to their carelessness, or want of shrewdness, or some failure in intelligence rather than integrity. If we look around us we shall see, not that the good are always successful in every thing they undertake, but that all the wisdom in the world, without integrity, is not sufficient to insure permanent success. Evil men may flourish for a time, but virtue is sure to come off victorious at last. We are apt to be impatient, and because we cannot discern the end from the very beginning, because we see "the wicked in great power," we forget that "yet a little while and the wicked shall not be." But the last is as sure as the first event. And the more distinguished and prominent is his situation in the eyes of the world, the more conspicuous is his fall.

On the other hand, if the good man should not be endowed with much of this world's skill, if his talents be but moderate, yet he will be found to prosper in his sphere. Success in life does not depend quite so much

upon our capacity, as we often imagine. What says Solomon? “A man’s heart (mind) deviseth his way ; “but the Lord directeth his steps.” This is the truth. “The Lord upholdeth the righteous,”—the humblest as well as the highest ; and when men shall be once fairly convinced of this, and act accordingly, the Kingdom of Heaven will have come on earth ; the natural calamities of this life will be regarded in their true light, as means of discipline towards the formation of character, and will be deprived of their bitterness, and men will find the happiness of “trusting in the Lord.”

I think much of the wisdom of the book of Proverbs ought to be attributed to the father of the writer, as many of the best and wisest maxims it contains are to be found also in the Psalms ; and their repetition by Solomon, and others who had some share in the book of Proverbs, shows the influence of David’s compositions upon men’s minds, and the extensive acquaintance with them prevalent in the nation.

Ecclesiastes seems to have been a later production of Solomon, if indeed it were written by him. It is not positively known who was the author of this book ; but it is commonly ascribed to the wise king. If it be his work, and written in an advanced period of life, the tone of his mind must have changed remarkably ; for there is a depression of spirits, a sort of splenetic dissatisfaction, running through it, which does not harmonize well with the just discriminations that are made in the Proverbs, between the different courses and end of the righteous and the wicked, nor with what he calls “the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God and

“keep His commandments.” If every thing be “vanity and vexation of spirit,”—if a man “hath no pre-eminence above a beast,”—then why trouble one’s self with obedience to the laws which suppose a distinction between a man and a beast? Is not the question just, “What is the Almighty, that we should serve ‘Him? and what profit should we have, if we pray to ‘Him?’” No, these statements are made altogether too strongly by the Preacher, in my judgment. He has not given the necessary qualifications of his general denunciations of the misery of human life; and if the work be considered an argument for virtue, because every thing else is vanity and vexation, even that is an over-statement which is entirely unnecessary. Nothing which is untrue can be necessary for an argument to a good course of conduct; and it is essentially untrue that the blessings of life are vanity and vexation, if they be rightly used. I regard that sort of extravagant condemnation of the goods of this life, as a proof that a man has not made a right use of the blessings with which God has surrounded him. He has sought in physical or temporary enjoyments a species of happiness which they are not adapted, nor intended, to give, and then condemns them, instead of himself. If he wishes for “peace of mind at the last,” let him pursue the course which he well knows will procure it, and let him receive with thankfulness the reasonable and lawful enjoyments, which God has placed along the straight path, not to detain us on our way, but to help us to pursue it with a cheerful heart and a willing mind. If he will regard these mercies not as objects and ends, but

simply in their true light of helps and solaces in our trials and difficulties, he will never despise them, nor murmur that they do not yield a perfect happiness, which neither they, nor the sum of life, if it were all made up of such pleasures, can give us.

I am afraid Solomon is open to this censure. He seems, with all his wisdom, to have led a life of splendor, luxury, and self-indulgence, ill adapted to the preservation of a right spirit within him ; and we know that in his old age he was weak enough to abandon the worship of Jehovah, and offer sacrifices to idols. It is not surprising that a man of such habits, and verging to such mournful imbecility, should have uttered these violent and unreasonable anathemas against the seeming incongruities and vexations of life ; and mingled all together, pains and pleasures, trials and gratifications, in one sweeping censure. But we must read this with a knowledge of his character and circumstances, and with due allowance for both, if we would avoid being misled by extravagant declamation. With the proper qualifications, if we will think them out for ourselves, much that is wise and useful may be found in this book ; and the last chapter contains as lofty poetry, and as true religious wisdom, as any in the whole collection of the Hebrew literature.

I cannot say so much for the next production of Solomon, which has been permitted to occupy a place in the Bible. It is simply a love-song, not superior to many of the kind, in other languages, nor of any utility whatsoever, that I can discover, except of a literary character. Its figures and allusions may help us

to understand other things of the same sort. But to call it, in any sense, a sacred song, or to claim for it an inspired character, is, to me, only offensive. A figurative and prophetic meaning has indeed been assigned to it, but without the slightest external authority, or internal evidence ; and that it should ever have been included among writings considered holy, must be regarded as one of the numerous misfortunes which have happened to the Bible, in the hands of the unenlightened.

CHAPTER IX. THE PROPHETIC BOOKS.

We have now come to the portion of the Scriptures which contains by far the greatest amount of difficulties, as well in number as in weight. This you will readily perceive upon the bare enumeration of those which we have to encounter in the prophetic books. In addition to those which are common to all the other books in the Bible, arising from the original obscurity of the language in which they are written, and the imperfect acquaintance of the best scholars with its meaning, we have that which arises from the mixed character of these particular writings, partaking of the poetic, historic, prophetic and didactic forms of composition. It is not easy to discover which of these characters the writer intended to adopt; for, sometimes, what is commonly understood as prophecy—as the 53d chapter of Isaiah, for instance, which very beautifully and touchingly describes the character, and some of the circumstances of the life and death of Jesus Christ—is in the narrative form; while there are many passages, like the last four verses of the 14th chapter of Isaiah, which, under the form of prediction, seem to prophecy nothing, and may be merely descriptive. It is extremely difficult, sometimes, perhaps, impossible, to discern the limits between poetry and prophecy, when the form of prophecy is assumed, and when in truth it may have been prophecy, the fulfilment of which is lost to us, in

the thick obscurity of the history of eastern nations in those remote times. And when to all these natural sources of uncertainty is added the multitude of systems of interpretation by which men's minds have been confused, you will not wonder that there should be a great accumulation of difficulties in the understanding of these books. One of the difficulties of the last kind consists in the great number of unwarrantable glosses which have been put on the prophecies by the headings of the chapters in our common editions of the Bible. Great perversions of the meaning of the author are sometimes the consequence of these captions, and it is not a little difficult to throw off the impressions they convey.

Under the pressure of all these embarrassments, there is one counsel I think it especially important to give, and that is, that you do not suffer yourself to indulge your imagination, nor to follow the guidance of the imagination of any one else, in putting interpretations upon these obscure works. Get clear and definite ideas in relation to any and all parts of them, whenever you can, but do not lightly think that you have hit upon a true interpretation, which has escaped every body else. Such things do not happen by chance. Patient study is necessary, even to put one's self in the way of understanding obscurities. It is of no use to do, as many are fond of doing in reading such books, put a vague, indefinite construction upon language which is itself indefinite. Suffer it to remain in its original obscurity, rather than bury it in your own mind, under another pile of ill understood words. One

has no right to guess at the meaning of these books. If they are to be interpreted at all, it must be by means of close application, and with some reasonable proof of the probability of the interpretation. These rules will enable you to judge of the correctness of what you may discover in others, or think you may discover yourselves.

To some minds, the proof of the divine revelation of Christianity derived from prophecy, seems the strongest ; and it is from their bearing upon this subsequent revelation that these works derive much of their importance to us. Others think that the proof of a revelation derived from miracles, is not only the most important, but is indispensable to the establishment of a claim to a divine origin ; while it will also be in itself sufficient, without the additional miracle of prophecy, in relation to it. Undoubtedly a distinct prophecy is as much a miracle as restoring sight to the blind. I can no more foresee what is to take place five hundred years hence, or to-morrow, than I can heal the sick, or clothe the naked, by a word ; it is, therefore, a good and strong proof of divine authority, and is appealed to, as such, by our Saviour himself. But that it is not of itself enough, or as much as we have reason to expect, is also proved by the fact that Christ and the apostles wrought miracles, and appealed first and principally to them, whenever there was a serious question of their authority.

And when we think of some of the circumstances attendant on the nature of prophecy, we shall not be surprised that it should not be considered as the highest

proof of a divine commission. In the first place, it is so difficult and so rare to perceive its true character before it is fulfilled, that it clearly amounts to little to those who live before its completion. Men may see that something is foretold, but they can have few clear ideas concerning it. So true is this, that notwithstanding the many passages in the prophets announcing the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, as we now believe, the Jews have never understood that fact in the least; but to this hour they suppose they are to have a temporal Messiah, who is to raise them to that state of glorious superiority they so much covet, when "the nation and kingdom that will not serve them shall perish."

And even after the fulfilment of prophecy, there is so much of doubt attending upon the proof, that it is, or may be, a subject of discussion and uncertainty, among those who are best disposed, as to its application. The language of prophecy is indefinite, and is not, I apprehend, designed to point out future facts with that perfect distinctness, which will render its application necessary, and this proof of divine interposition indisputable. It seems to be the design of Providence to leave something, under all circumstances, to men's judgment and reason, faculties which, to a great extent, are in their own keeping, and for the use of which they are responsible. "If a man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself," says our Saviour; i. e. if a man will conscientiously use his faculties, and keep them, by proper habits, in a fit condition

to be used, he will find little difficulty in ascertaining the truth with regard to the essentials of religion, whether natural or revealed ; and he will know, or be firmly persuaded in his own mind, that prophecy and miracle, and internal character, all go to make up the abundant and harmonious proof of divine revelation, and the interposition of God in the affairs of men.

There are passages, in these books, of the prophetic character of which I entertain no doubt, especially those referring to the coming of the Messiah, and the effects of Christianity, many of which are yet to be fulfilled. But there are others, the application of which I do not understand, from want of acquaintance, perhaps, with the history of the times to which they refer ; and many, of which I have never seen any satisfactory explanation. But I can read these authors with the deepest interest and with profit, notwithstanding my occasional ignorance of their meaning, and with the highest admiration of their sublime virtue and exalted minds. When, or where, were there men of higher intellects, or courage, or integrity, than Isaiah and Daniel ? Who ever exhibited greater purity and zeal for the right, than all of them ? And where can we find any writings that contain more of the spirit of religion, or of the essence of morality, or of the exaltation of poetry ? They have been and are a perfect storehouse of sublime thought to all succeeding generations of authors, whether in poetry, morals, or religion ; and there is not a language of Europe that is not enriched by the imagery, the fervor and enthusiasm of these extraordinary men and writers. In them is found

the same characteristic tone which pervades all the other works in the Bible, viz : a constant inculcation of virtue, and warning against vice. They are perpetually counselling and urging their countrymen to avoid idolatry and wickedness, to fear and serve God ; and if bold denunciation, and threatening, or ardent exhortation, could produce any effect upon men's minds, it must have been produced, and must still be produced by theirs. There is nothing like it anywhere else, and it is scarcely probable there ever will be any thing like it again.

Think, for a moment, of what would be the effect upon the world, if all the writings we have been considering were blotted out of existence—that there were no more an Old Testament. Would not the loss be irreparable ? Would they not be well saved, if that could be done, by the loss of any literature, the richest, of ancient or modern times ? And then, again, think of what would be the condition of the world if these writings had never existed. If there had been no Judaism, there could probably have been no Christianity ; and we should have been, perhaps, idolaters and uncivilized, or to speak more properly, we, as we now are, could not have existed at all ; and there would have been nothing in the world but barbarism and heathenism.

Let us thank God, then, for these books, which have been, in His providence, such immensely powerful agents in the introduction of all the greatest blessings we enjoy, in the shape of religion and civilization. Let us never think or speak of them but with the res-

pect and attachment which are their due; and while we avoid any thing like a superstitious reverence for them, let us regard them, as they are in truth, as among the productions of the best minds and the best hearts that have ever lived.

There is a mode of speaking of these writers, much in vogue with those who think highly of themselves, and are disposed to question the merit of any thing that did not originate with them, which is calculated to diminish the respect in which they ought to be held. They had the good fortune, it is said, to be the earliest writers, and of course they had the opportunity to say first what others might have said as well or better than they. Some have even professed that they thought themselves capable of making a better revelation of God's will than Moses, or than Jesus Christ himself. For my part, I can only say I am glad it was not left to persons who think so much more highly of themselves than they ought to think, to declare the counsels of the Almighty; nor do I believe there is any truth in the insinuation that the earliest writers are the best, or most striking. In every literature there is a period of growth, and the first authors, if they had the opportunity of saying the best things, very rarely used it. Certainly the earliest writers on religion and duty were so far from being the best, in other nations and languages, that they are positively the worst and most absurd. Nowhere is there an instance, except in the Hebrew tongue, of truth, with regard to the character of God, and the duty of man, being clearly developed, and fully enforced by the very first known writer. This is a

fact to be accounted for. It cannot be kept out of sight, disguised, or denied. It stands prominent and pre-eminent in the history of the world; and it has never yet been accounted for, nor has even an attempt been made to account for it, nor would the attempt, if made, be successful, in my opinion, without an acknowledgment of the interposition of God. All the rest of the Hebrew scriptures, and of the Hebrew history, is in perfect harmony with their outset, and would be utterly unintelligible and strange but upon the supposition of the truth of the whole. I do not mean the truth of every word, or of every minute fact asserted, but the general truth of the whole, as it would be understood by any rational interpreter. It is all well connected, if true; if not, it is a strange jumble of inconsistencies of character; of men preaching virtue and integrity and truth, with the most outrageous falsehoods in their mouths; and proclaiming the most sublime doctrines in the most sublime manner, and voluntarily renouncing the fame to which they would be entitled, if those doctrines were their own invention, and ascribing all to a higher, omniscient and almighty power.

Men of such minds and characters do not lie. It is the intriguing, narrow-minded, or selfish person, who attempts impositions upon the world; and in general, I know not why I should not say universally, the attempt is discovered, and ultimately fails.

But how do you know, says the objector, that it will not yet be discovered with regard to Moses and Christ? I have tried to give you, in the preceding pages, some of the reasons why I believe it will not; and to these

I will only add that I cannot imagine either Judaism or Christianity to go through more thorough investigation, or more severe trials of every description than they have already endured unshaken. The wisest and clearest and most logical minds have been convinced by the evidence in their favor, and I am ready to rest upon it with entire faith, till I see some more satisfactory argument than I have ever yet met with against their truth.

I do not go at all into detail on the particular difficulties which occur to ingenuous minds, or which have been started by disingenuous ones. My object is merely to point out those general principles and feelings which ought to guide you in particular researches, and to put you in the way of finding out the truth for yourselves. The best mode of doing this is to keep yourselves free from moral bias, which is vice, and from intellectual bias, which is prejudice, and then diligently "search the scriptures."

NEW TESTAMENT.

Here the Redeemer's welcome voice
Spreads heavenly peace around,
And life and everlasting joys
Attend the blissful sound.

CHAPTER X.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT.

There was a period of about four hundred and fifty years, from the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem to the birth of our Saviour, of which we have no detailed history. A single fragment of the Apocrypha contains an account of the partial and fruitless war between the Maccabees, and Antiochus Epiphanes, one of the successors of Alexander the Great; and then we have nothing more to illustrate the condition of the Jews, till the time of our Saviour, when we find them in the same subjection to Roman power, in which the rest of the then civilized world is known to have been,

They were divided into several parts; the Jews, so called, probably, as being or claiming to be, the posterity of Judah, having possession of Jerusalem, and the southern and northern extremities of Canaan, and the Samaritans occupying a district lying between these two tracts of country. They were no longer two kingdoms, nor were they even entirely distinct provinces of the empire; but neighbors and brethren as they were,

there was a reciprocal dislike between the Jews and Samaritans, amounting to antipathy, and a suspension of the ordinary intercourse of life, as between hostile powers. The worship of Jehovah was maintained both at Jerusalem, and Mount Gerizim, with such solemnity, and pomp, and purity, as the degraded, and subjugated, and despised people could command ; but the frequent lamentations over the difference between the former and the latter temple sufficiently indicate the fallen state of the nation.

This condition of things, which had been of long continuance, gave an impatient eagerness to their hopes of the birth of one who was to be their leader to glory, conquest and power ; one who, like Moses, was to rescue them from the iron grasp of a power they feared and hated, in the hands of a people for whom they felt the contempt which was reciprocated towards them by the Romans. There are many passages in the prophets which were supposed by the Jews to describe the glory of the Messiah's kingdom in such terms as, if taken by themselves, might, without violence, be understood to refer to temporal splendor. Annoyed and oppressed as they had been for many ages, it is not surprising that they should have so interpreted such passages ; nor that, as generation after generation passed away, their expectation and hope of such a political saviour should have become more and more ardent, till they reached an intensity of fervor. It would be considered at once a political and a religious duty to believe in the coming of one who was to relieve them from all their distresses, and guide them to a condition the very reverse of that

which they actually occupied. How was the Messiah to resemble Moses, if he did not liberate them from bondage, if he did not establish them in independence, and make other nations serve them?

This must be fully understood and appreciated, in order that we may at all comprehend the extraordinary fury exhibited by the Jews against Jesus Christ. What was there in his character, or conduct, to excite such deadly hatred? How could any body so persecute the mildest, kindest and purest being ever seen on earth, one who went about doing good, injuring none—even of those who would have stoned him, and who did, at last, kill him with torture and ignominy,—who spake as never man spake, and whose miracles were uniformly for the most beneficent purposes?

Such a feeling is not only shocking, but it is out of nature; it is not to be accounted for on any other principle than that it was the outbreak of their sudden and terrible disappointment. Here was a man whom many began to think must be the Messiah, from the miracles they saw him perform; and what does he do? Instead of raising his standard and beginning a rebellion, or like Moses, performing miracles for the liberation of his countrymen, he goes about preaching peace, humility and forgiveness of injuries, the very reverse of the proud and military spirit which they had secretly nourished in the midst of all their humiliation and subjection. The miracles he performed, if they did not convince them that he was the Messiah, as was sometimes the case, only provoked them to anger and violence. They were either ready to seize him by force,

and compel him to act as they supposed the Messiah ought to act, or else they would beseech him to depart out of their coasts, and relieve them from all controversy about claims they would not admit, and could not deny.

For what, then, you may ask, was all this preparation? Here was a nation set apart from the rest of the world for the very purpose of establishing and preserving the knowledge of God; and in due time of extending it to the whole human race. Here was prophecy upon prophecy relating to the Messiah, from the days of Abraham to those of Ezra, and yet the people among whom he was to appear were not, after all, prepared for him; they did not understand him, nor his object; they resisted, persecuted, and murdered him; and, with the firmness for which they were always remarkable, they continue in the same resistance to this day. Does not this look as if the arrangements of the Almighty were ineffectual—as if he had intended to produce a certain effect, and failed to do so?

If we suppose that God designed to introduce the Messiah to splendor and power in this world, then, indeed, there might be ground for such a question. But, if the object were to introduce and extend the influence of pure religion and religious truth, and at the same time to leave men to that exercise of their own wills and judgments which they ordinarily enjoy; to present to them a system in perfect harmony with all that had preceded it, and allow them to accept or reject it, according to their own judgment and pleasure; then I think the plan has succeeded, as far as we can

ever distinctly see the success of God's works and ways. We are so short-lived, so short-sighted, and so impatient, that we are rarely willing to acknowledge His hand, except in its sudden, quick movements ; and we are very apt to require omnipotence to work in the same rapid way in which we wish to produce effects ourselves. But I see Christianity introduced into the world, and gradually extending its beneficent influence ; I see it produced with proofs of divine agency, and I am satisfied of its divine origin, although the whole world was not at once converted, and great part of it is still in the darkness of heathenism. God has eternity to operate in, and all the time past, since the creation of man, is short and insignificant, compared with the duration to come. It must not be forgotten, too, that human free agency was not to be entirely done away. Men were not to be compelled to become Christians, any more than they were to be obliged to eat the same food, or walk in a particular direction. Their understandings were to be left as free on this subject as on others, and of course it requires time for mind to operate upon mind, and extend the influence of religious truth over the world.

But, admitting that the plan of the Deity has succeeded, how would it have been if the Jews had received and welcomed their Messiah in his true character—had believed in him and obeyed him ? This, obviously, is mere matter of conjecture, but I see no reason for any finite being adopting the conclusion that because one course of measures has succeeded, therefore another would not have succeeded. The resources

of the Almighty are infinite; and doubtless the great truths, taught by Jesus Christ, might have been as effectually developed and enforced, if he had lived and died in peace, as if he had suffered all which actually befel him.

But this is an unnecessary hypothesis. All that is important is, to show that there is nothing inconsistent with divine perfection either in the religion, or the mode of its establishment and propagation. Observe that I say, 1st, that the religion itself, i. e. its doctrines, and precepts, and sanctions; and, 2dly, that the mode of its establishment and propagation, must be consistent with the divine character, in order to my conviction of its authority. There are those who require but the half of the above terms, to be satisfied. One man will tell you the character of the religion itself is quite enough; that no external proof can add strength to the internal evidence; and that he believes in it because it is in conformity with his own nature, which he feels and knows to be of divine origin. This man confounds possibility with authority. I must know something more of a doctrine, than that it harmonizes with human nature, before I can believe God has revealed it. If the doctrine be new to me, like that of the future life, I may see that it is not inconsistent with my nature, and therefore is not impossible, as it would be if it were inconsistent with my nature. But who shall convince me that it is not only possible, but true, certain, divinely revealed? He, only, who proves himself by miracles, to be a messenger from God. And he who goes so far as to reject all belief in miracles,

rejects, in my judgment, an essential part of the proof of Christianity ; and however he may agree to the doctrines, he receives them on no authority higher than his own judgment of their nature and truth, and therefore can scarcely be said to belong to the religion he professes. Its divine authority is an essential ingredient in its character.

On the other hand, there are those who think miracles can prove any thing, and require us to believe absurdities, because, say they, those things which you call absurdities are in the Bible, and are sustained by miracles. Besides the answer I gave before to this reasoning—that we have no right to impute absurdity to a rational author, if there be any means of understanding him to write good sense—I now go further, and say that miracles cannot prove falsehoods, cannot prove that which we know to be inconsistent with natural right and positive fact. All the miracles that could be imagined, could not convince me, or any other man, that one body, or one particle, could be in two places at once, even if they were wrought for this express purpose. We should inevitably think them lying wonders ; for our conviction of the truth is stronger than any effect that seeming miracles can produce. So, if a man should teach that a child might lawfully murder his parent to obtain his patrimony, no wonders could convince us of the propriety of a doctrine which is contrary to natural morals. Our conviction that God is a being of truth and consistency, would irresistibly lead us to the result that the seeming miracle must be a deception. And in rude ages, or among uncultivat-

ed men, such inconsistencies with nature have been attributed to demons or devils, and not to the Creator.

No apparent miracles, then, can prove a falsehood, or an absurdity; and I must not be required to believe any such thing on their authority. I say apparent miracles, because the idea that real miracles can be performed for any such purpose is impossible. I cannot put the terms together. Real miracles come from God, and are consistent with His truth. And it is this consistency between the miracles and the doctrines, upon which I insist as necessary to complete the proof of revelation. Neither can be dispensed with. The doctrines must be consistent with God and nature in order to be possible, and therefore susceptible of proof; and then we require the actual proof, which is miracles.

In the history of the propagation of Christianity in the first ages, we find this was the course observed; the doctrines were stated and explained, and miracles were appealed to in proof; and wherever there was no opposition from preconceived opinions, as in the case of the Jews, there was little difficulty in prevailing. The spread of the religion was by no means slow or small, as soon as it was offered to the heathen; and it would continue to be encouraging, probably, if there were now, as then, civilized and enlightened heathen, and if no attempts were made to teach absurdities and falsehoods with the authority of miracles.

The state of the world, at the birth of our Saviour, was peculiar. The whole of the southern part, and much that would now be called the north of Europe, a large portion of western Asia, and of northern Africa, con-

stituting all that region of the globe which contained inhabitants in any degree civilized, so far as is known, were under the absolute government of the Romans, who were distinguished, as you know, for their active, vigorous, stern, and military character. Up to this period they had been essentially a military people; but, in the reign of Augustus, they began to feel not merely the pleasures of a state of peace, both at home and abroad—pleasures the more striking because of so rare occurrence—but the influence of the arts and elegances of life. Wealth, both national and individual, began to abound, and to produce its usual effects, softening, and gradually enervating the character. One of the customary consequences of luxury and leisure, among those who are not altogether given up to the pleasures of sense, is the cultivation of the intellectual accomplishments, and an increased taste for speculative studies. This tendency was strengthened in the Romans by the prevailing fashion of the day, of reading the philosophical, poetical, and other productions of the Greeks, who preceded them in these paths of speculation, and who seem to have held, at that time, a similar, though still more prominent, relative literary position to that which has been maintained by the French, in our own day. Acquaintance with the Greek language and literature was universal, with those who pretended to literature at all, and this would, almost of course, extend as far as leisure and means would permit.

The productions of their own poets and orators were also beginning to be numerous, and it could not fail to have an enlightening and civilizing effect to be familiar

with the writings of Virgil, Horace, and Cicero. The moral, philosophical and religious essays of the latter, especially, would naturally and almost irresistibly lead the age to reflection on those interesting topics, the end and object of life, the duties of man, and the nature of the soul, to throw light on which was the purpose of Christianity. And how deeply the want of this light was felt by the minds of that era, it is impossible to read their works without perceiving. How eagerly would not Cicero, with his ardent longing after immortality, with his purity of character, and clear understanding—an understanding brightened by constant use in the practice of the forum, as well as by reflection in his study—have seized upon the revelation by Jesus Christ, if it had been offered to him. One can hardly help lamenting that he had not an opportunity to examine the evidences of the religion, and enjoy its glorious truths. Many a superficial and flimsy argument of the unbeliever would have been anticipated and answered by his brilliant intellect and honest heart, and his anxious fears and struggling hopes would have been calmed and satisfied by the certainty of a future immortal life. But it were unwise and ungrateful to repine. Christianity does not lack able defenders; and Cicero is, perhaps, as valuable to succeeding generations, by showing the extent of the powers, and the wants of unaided reason, as he could have been if he had known, examined and embraced the religion we profess.

At the very period when men's minds were, more than ever before, turned to subjects of this nature, and when there were greater facilities of intercommunica-

tion among civilized nations, from the circumstance of their being under one government, and therefore undisturbed by war, and by the use of a common language, familiar to all cultivated people, there appeared a teacher of truth among a nation who were of a very peculiar character, very conveniently situated for the dissemination of the new doctrines, but very little likely to have invented any such theories from their natural superiority of mind, or from any predisposition arising from education, or habits of thought. All these, viz: their education and their prejudices, were directly adverse to the reception of the doctrines of Christ; and their reputation for intellectual resources, or cultivation, was low among contemporary nations. They were utterly unprepared for the revelation which was to be made to them, and through them to the rest of mankind; while every circumstance in the moral, intellectual and political condition of the world, elsewhere, was beautifully and perfectly adapted to the reception and extension of the new doctrines and commandments. Every valley was exalted, every mountain and hill was brought low, the crooked was made straight, and the rough places plain, that the glory of the Lord might be revealed, and all flesh see it together,

We cannot compare the advantages of this epoch with those of any succeeding period, because the history of the world has been so deeply affected by the introduction of Christianity, that we are totally unable to imagine what would have been the condition of things without it. But it would be difficult to point out any preceding age so well adapted to the promul-

gation of religious truth as that of the birth of our Saviour. In the unceasing and savage wars of earlier times, the voice of the religion of peace could not have been heard at all; and in the thick night of barbarian ignorance, in the uncultivated desert of heathen indifference to intellectual pursuits, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the ‘Lord,’ if heard, must have been entirely disregarded.

It was not till men’s minds began to be awakened to the importance of moral and religious truth, nor until the utter fruitlessness of all human attempts, by unaided reason, to fathom the mystery which surrounded them on all sides, was perfectly proved by sufficient experience, that the world could be in a condition to appreciate or receive the explanation which Christ gave in his preaching, life, death and resurrection, of the design and end of our being. As soon as such knowledge could be received, it was communicated. At any earlier period it would have been with the whole human race as it was with the Jews, of whom St. John writes—“The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” The prejudices, pre-conceived opinions of the Jews, respecting their Messiah, blinded their eyes to the truth, and they blindly fulfilled the purposes of the Almighty; and at any earlier point of the history of the world, the heathen would have turned an indifferent ear, if they could have been induced to listen at all, to the glad tidings of the gospel. It was in “the fulness of time” that “Christ Jesus came into the world;” and as there is nothing more completely beyond human power than the desig-

nation of the time, and the preparation of circumstances, for a particular event, I can conceive of nothing which ought to have greater influence in leading us to acknowledge the finger of God.

It was necessary not merely that men's minds should be prepared for attention to these subjects, by their own experience and reflection, and that their physical and political condition should enable them to bestow the requisite attention, but that there should be an easy and attractive mode of communication; and this was furnished by the common and increasing use of the Greek language. We find, upon opening the New Testament, that it is written, not in Hebrew, as the previous compositions of the Jews were, and as we might expect from its being still in use as a spoken language in Judea, but in Greek; and it is worth while to consider, for a moment, the great advantages derived from the use of this language rather than the other.

The Hebrew has a very limited vocabulary, modes of construction very different from those of all western languages, and written signs of a very inartificial and imperfect character. It was the production and the type of an early age of the world, an age of simplicity, rudeness and strength, but without either elegance or precision. The Greek, on the contrary, had a copious vocabulary, a beautiful and well understood construction, and written signs which seem to be as abundant and accurate as the nature of signs for articulate sounds permits. The productions of Hebrew authors were all, as I have remarked, of one character, i. e. they were all of a religious nature and tendency; though

other matters than religion, such as law, history, poetry, and secular wisdom, are mingled in them, according to the peculiar inclination and talent of each mind. But the small number of writings, and the limited variety of subjects on which they were composed, render the interpretation of the language difficult and uncertain; while the Greek has the great advantage, not only of a large vocabulary, which gives it the power of expressing many ideas and shades of ideas that cannot be conveyed by a language possessing a small list of words, but of a great number of authors, too, who have left behind them works on a far greater variety of subjects than the Hebrew writers. In Greek, we have very fine models of composition, in poetry of every description, philosophy, oratory, history, science—in short, on almost every subject but that very one on which the Hebrew authors most abound; so that the meaning of their words can be determined with far greater probability of accuracy than of those in the Hebrew tongue.

Then the beauty of style of Greek writers, the elegance of their language, and the mingled simplicity, richness, precision and fervor of their thoughts, render it almost certain that, in all ages and countries claiming any high degree of civilization, the language will be studied by men of refinement and cultivation, for its own sake. Indeed, its superiority over most other languages is so great, that it would not be surprising if, in the progress of the revival which seems to have begun in its native land, it should recover its living voice, and the predominance it maintained over other tongues

for several centuries. But, delightful and interesting as such an incident in the literary and religious history of the world might be, it is unnecessary it should occur, in order to prove the great advantage of the use of the Greek in the early ages of Christianity. The purest religion was taught, and its history recorded, in the most beautiful language which has yet existed among civilized men; and this was one of the means of its propagation, as fast and as far as the civilization necessary for its reception had preceded it.

Another circumstance which seems to me worthy of observation, in regard to the promulgation of Christianity, is the geographical position of its birth-place. On the western confines of the Oriental half of the world, the men by whom the religion was first taught were acquainted with the habits of thought and speech on both sides of them. They were familiar, at once, with the eastern magnificence and indefiniteness of diction, and with the greater accuracy of the west. They knew how to adapt themselves, and they were in some degree compelled to adapt themselves to both. Perfectly acquainted with all the eastern poetry and modes of life, they were obliged to write in a language of European origin, which admitted with difficulty of the tropes and figures they would probably have used more freely in their native tongue. Thus they felt as Orientals, and eastern nations would sympathise with them; they wrote as Europeans, and the western world would understand them.

You recollect I pointed out certain general characteristics of the books of the Old Testament, of which

it is necessary to be aware in perusing them. It is not less necessary to remember the peculiar origin of the books of the New Testament, and the circumstances in the state of the world which have a bearing upon the interpretation of them. It would be impossible to enumerate all, without doing the very thing I wish to avoid, writing an elaborate treatise, and I shall therefore content myself with just mentioning, as I have done, some of those which strike me as important, in the hope that you will be led to pursue these interesting studies, under the guidance of others, with more minuteness, and that you will derive benefit from having the relative bearings and distances of the important points laid down in a general chart of your course of inquiry.

CHAPTER XI. THE GOSPELS.

The first thing I remark, on opening the New Testament, is that there are four memoirs of the same person, written by different individuals; two of them eye witnesses of his conduct, and listeners to his instructions, and the others intimate friends and companions of those two. This is a most extraordinary amount of independent testimony to the facts in the case. The circumstance is so familiar to us that we do not think of it, and we see them all bound up together, and imagine they are all but one work. We can perhaps attain a more just perception of the truth, by supposing ourselves in the position of an intelligent Roman, who had recently heard something of Jesus Christ, had become interested in his history, and in the course of inquiry finds one of these memoirs, that of Matthew, for instance. He reads it with the mingled astonishment and admiration it is adapted to produce. He can scarcely be said to believe, at once. Surprise and wonder, and a desire to investigate the truth of this extraordinary account are the first strong emotions of his mind. Under ordinary circumstances, he would believe the testimony of any respectable person to what he had himself seen and heard; but additional evidence of the truth of such a story of miraculous power, and a not less miraculous character, is now the object of his eager pursuit. After a time, he finds Mark's account

of the same transactions, and thus discovers another person equally credible, and with almost equal opportunities, who testifies to the very same facts. It has some appearance of being an abridgement of Matthew's book, it corresponds so remarkably with it ; but still it is the evidence of another contemporary, if not eye witness of all the transactions ; and his doubts are rapidly giving way to the increasing conviction of the truth.

The composition of Luke comes next into his hands ; and here he finds not only another writer, but a very different style, a different arrangement of the events and instructions, a general agreement with the others, yet particular differences which mark, in the most decided manner, the independence of the testimony. Can there be any more doubt of the truth ? The moral and intellectual perfection of Christ's character, as well as his miracles, are hard for him to believe. He has never heard of such a man ; and the prominence given to the gentle virtues in all his instructions, and the condemnation bestowed so unqualifiedly on the haughty self-reliance he has been taught to consider meritorious, are all the very reverse of his previous notions ; but the more he reflects on the subjects, the more he is convinced that Jesus Christ is right, and himself and his philosophical guides have been wrong.

And however difficult it may be to imagine such a character as that of Christ a reality, it is still more difficult to imagine it a fiction. If an invention, whose was it ? Who was it that had the genius to describe a character not merely superior to any other ever

known, but so new, so directly the reverse of all that was then esteemed great? If several persons had the capacity to invent it, what could have tempted them to suffer, and even die, in attestation of its truth? If a fiction, why should they have been willing to go through all this, any more than Homer, for his stories of Circe and the Syrens? No, the account must be substantially true, and it deserves the name it has received, of "good news." It is the best news that has ever reached the world, for it explains all that was perplexing in life, and satisfies all the aspirations of human nature.

When, afterwards, our Roman sees the beautiful narrative of the beloved apostle, it is already superfluous as testimony, but it fills out the picture of the character and teachings of Christ in such a way that he is absorbed in delight and admiration. He now knows that "this was the Son of God," for that is the only name worthy of such perfection. He is now a Christian. He has evidence enough to justify and require his belief of the statements of the writers, wonderful as they are. If the facts are extraordinary, so is the proof of them. There never was an instance of such an amount of competent evidence being given as to the life, or instructions, of any man known to history, as was the case with Jesus Christ; and if any one thinks that, notwithstanding this fact, it cannot be a true history, he has the somewhat difficult task before him of accounting for its existence at all. What could have induced men to write these books, to suffer and die declaring their truth, if they were fictions? Did ever

mortal invent such fictions? Did ever men who were writing fables, run counter to the spirit and character of their age, in every important respect?

All impostors have flattered or exaggerated the spirit of the times, or have beguiled others to their own advantage, in some way; but these men, while teaching the sublimest and most useful and delightful doctrines, inculcating precepts and asserting principles which, if not true, it would be inconceivably desirable should be true, were so opposed to prejudice among their own countrymen, and to the temper and character of the majority of the world without, that they were necessarily exposed to misrepresentation, suffering and persecution, for which neither they nor their followers obtained, or sought, the slightest compensation other than the hopes and consolations arising from their own doctrines. If this be not inexplicable, except upon the supposition that they told the truth as to what they had seen and heard, I at least cannot imagine any thing to be so.

It seems to me a perfect "*reductio ad absurdum.*" Either these men were mad, through much learning, or much ignorance, or great stupidity; and if so, it behoves the unbeliever to show both the fact and its cause, or else they stated truly what they heard and saw, and the doctrines are true, and the commandments are of authority. This argument, though but one among many in support of the truth of Christianity, is entirely sufficient for me; and until I see all the acknowledged facts in the case, the existence of the religion itself, its records, and its history, better explained than I have ever

seen them accounted for, and on some principle more consistent with nature and probability than the supposition of their truth, I shall be content to rest, where I have always rested with confidence, in the conviction of the truth as it is in Jesus.

A great argument against the truth of *any* statement in the Gospels, is the discrepancies which exist sometimes between the several accounts ; as between the genealogies of Jesus Christ in the beginning of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, or in the list of apostles recorded by the two evangelists. There are a great many ways in which such differences may be explained consistently with probability ; but whether so or not, I maintain that differences, in unessential particulars, are necessary, in order to produce conviction of the truth of several narratives of the same circumstances. Without them the evidence would be reduced to that of one person, from whom the others copied, or else we should be entirely satisfied that there was collusion between the writers. The only way in which several different authors can avoid the charge of conspiracy, when they produce narratives of the same occurrences, is by having some differences of statement. No two pair of eyes see exactly the same circumstances in the same relative order, or position ; and no two minds derive the same ideas from them, or fall upon precisely the same expressions in describing them. Differences, therefore, are inevitable, as long as men intend to adhere to the truth. And when no discrepancies occur in narratives like those of

the Gospels, conspiracy is the only way of accounting for such an unheard of agreement.

But, in the investigation of truth, other matters must be taken into consideration. If discrepancies produce doubts as to the accuracy, or fidelity, of different writers, they produce conviction of their independence of each other; and this being admitted, how is their agreement upon any fact to be accounted for, except by the supposition of the truth of that statement? The agreements are things to be explained, as well as the differences; and the objector must not think he has overthrown testimony as inaccurate or false, when, perhaps, he has given it new weight, as honest and independent. Now, for one discrepancy between the evangelists, there are a hundred instances of agreement; and this circumstance is particularly to be observed, that whereas the disagreements are all in some little circumstances of detail, of not the slightest moment, except as proofs of honest independence, for which purpose they are invaluable, the cases of agreement are all in the narratives of important events, in the relation of the most important instructions, in the expression of the most important doctrines, in the record of the most striking miracles.

What is to be done with these records? Suppose a man to disbelieve the Evangelists because the narrative of the resurrection is not, word for word, the same in them all, or for any or all of the other discrepancies. Still, the points of agreement remain; and there they will remain through all ages, the sure and safe foundation

of Christian faith. Every generation of enlightened students sees some of the difficulties which have surrounded these books vanish. As knowledge increases, and investigation is carried on with zeal and fidelity, obscurities are made plain, customs are discovered which illustrate what was not understood, and criticism develops the doubtful meaning of a perplexing passage. But the important, fundamental truths and doctrines remain the same that they have ever been, unchanged and unchangeable as the God and Father who revealed them to us by his Son.

It has been supposed, by some profound theological scholars, that there was a document written in Hebrew, compiled by various persons, perhaps, but of considerable extent, and widely circulated among the contemporaries of our Saviour, containing what might be called the Memorabilia of Christ, and from which the first three Evangelists selected all those passages which they have in common, each translating them into Greek after their own manner.* This may have been so, though I confess the arguments adduced in proof do not seem to me absolutely conclusive; but whether it were so or not is immaterial to this argument; for the testimony of the three evangelists to the facts is distinct and independent, unless it be shown not merely that they separately made use of a common document, but that they agreed together to make such and such statements and no other. This has not been attempted.

*Matthew is supposed to have written originally in Hebrew; but it is not known by whom his gospel was translated.

I remarked that the discrepancies were in unimportant particulars ; but it may be said no particulars are unimportant ; that the mere fact of their being stated in connexion with a pretended revelation makes them important, and that they must be proved as accurately as the essential doctrines or miracles. This is clearly impossible, unless men be supposed infallible, and we are brought back, after all, to the natural distinction between the important and the unimportant.

An instance of what I consider unimportant is the difference between the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. This has sometimes been represented as an insurmountable difficulty. A man cannot have two fathers ; and who was Joseph's father, Heli according to Luke, or Jacob according to Matthew, or neither of them ? There are many ways in which the difference in the genealogies may be explained, but I cannot conceive it to be material. The only point which can be considered essential is that Jesus should be shown, in some way or other, to be descended from David ; and this, in order that the words of prophecy might be fulfilled respecting his family. “There shall ‘come a rod out of the stem of Jesse.’” But why are we to construe prophecy so literally ? It seems to me quite enough that our Saviour was born a Jew, without proving his lineal descent from David. There was an interval of more than a thousand years between the time of David and that of Christ ; enough, surely, to render mistakes in genealogical records natural, if not inevitable. What family of modern Europe can be traced back for a thousand years without suspi-

cion of error? And suppose one or both of these genealogies to be incorrect, which is clearly the most unfavorable supposition that can be made, what is the consequence? Does it throw doubt upon any fact in the personal history of Christ? Does it change his doctrines, or his character, or affect the proof of his miracles? Not in the least. It is manifest that the whole difficulty arises out of the assertion of the inspiration of the writings, with which the smallest error is incompatible; and that if we will only judge of what is contained in these books on the same principles we adopt with regard to others, we shall have no difficulty in ascertaining the important truths, and separating them from the unimportant errors which may be found in them.

Another argument which has often been in great favor with unbelievers in the divine authority of Jesus Christ, is the low condition in life of his first followers. How were fishermen and people of that stamp to judge whether such or such a transaction were miracle or trick, divine inspiration, or human imposture? Without contenting myself with the obvious reply that intelligence and good sense are not peculiar to any station, I shall go a little farther, and maintain that the apostles, the companions, friends and first preachers of Christ were men of no ordinary character and capacity; that there is evidence enough in what is recorded of them, and in the manner of the record, to prove that they were perfectly competent to the duty for which they were selected; and that there is no reason

to believe that greater fitness for it, either by nature or education, could have been found in the nation.

In the first place, the profession of a fisherman by no means presupposes stupidity or ignorance. On the contrary, there is not a class of persons who, from habit, and almost from necessity, are more observant of what is passing around them. They are apt to be better acquainted with the common course of nature, in many respects, than other men, and can therefore judge better when that course is violated, and to what extent superhuman power is exerted. No one, certainly, could estimate better than such men the violence of a storm, or the suddenness with which it subsided; nor could any but fishermen decide understandingly whether or not their success, in their own daily employment, was natural, or supernatural. Such men could also judge, at least as well as any others, how many mouths could be fed by "five loaves and two 'small fishes,'" as their occupation must often have led them to provide food for a longer period than usually passes between meals.

But it does not appear that they were all fishermen. Matthew at least was in a public station of trust and responsibility; and in the absence of positive evidence, it is not unreasonable to presume that the seven or eight others were taken from a variety of employments, and from classes of persons who were sufficiently able to see and judge for themselves, and record for the benefit of others what they had heard and seen. If incredulity be a proof of sense, as it seems often to be

regarded, Thomas certainly was sufficiently cautious in yielding his assent to positive assertion; and it is not to be doubted, by any one who will consider the point, that the influence of such a man as Thomas must have been constantly and strongly felt in their little society.

Whether it were owing to this influence, or to their own turn of mind, I know not, but one thing is clear, viz: that none of them were what would be called credulous persons, but positively the reverse. They were all “slow of heart to believe” the very words of their own master. Had he not told them, not only that he was to be put to death, but that he was to rise again? Had he not wrought miracles enough to induce them to place reliance on his assurances? They were quite ready to profess their confidence in him; but when it was put to the proof, where was it? Not one of them, nor of the women who were most nearly connected with them believed, or even recollects, his prophecy of a resurrection. At the crucifixion they all forsook him and fled, except the women; and though their sympathy was greater, it is manifest their faith was no stronger. They followed Christ to his tomb, not that they might see him rise from it in due season, but that they might know where to carry their spices to *embalm his body*. Disappointed at not finding it, on the morning of the third day after the crucifixion, Mary wept, because, said she, without a thought of a resurrection, “they have taken away my ‘Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.’”

And these were the credulous, simple persons, so

ready to believe every thing that was told them, and admit every pretension well or ill founded! It seems to me that if hesitation and slowness to believe any thing, without irresistible proof, be a qualification for the position occupied by the apostles, of witnesses to the displays of miraculous power, they were pre-eminently suited to the station. One would expect to find enthusiastic, excitable persons most profoundly aroused at this crisis. It was precisely the reverse with the apostles. So little impression had been made on their minds by the promise of a resurrection, that they every one of them forgot it, even when circumstances might have reminded them of it; and it required reiterated assertion to make them perceive the fact, and appreciate its consequences. Credulous persons believe that which they expect or desire, without proof; these men and women could scarcely be made to believe the fact, on any proof.

There is another assertion often made in disparagement of the apostles and evangelists, which seems to me equally destitute of foundation; viz: that they were vulgar, ill informed persons who could not be supposed capable of appreciating the claims of such a man as Jesus Christ, as well as those of higher cultivation might have done. Now, not merely referring, as I might do, to their works, to prove them to have been fully capable of understanding the nature of Christ's doctrines and character, I deny the assertion altogether, and undertake to show not merely from the substance, but from the manner of their writings, that they were

men of true refinement of character, and of sufficient cultivation of mind to constitute them unimpeachable witnesses to the truth.

I will omit St. Paul at present, and refer to the literary productions of the others. We have writings by Matthew, James, John, Peter and Jude, who were apostles, and by Mark and Luke, who were their associates and friends. Five out of twelve of the original apostles have left us the means of estimating their capacity and education; quite a sufficient proportion, one would think, to enable us to judge of the whole. The works of all are remarkably well adapted, in style and manner, to their object; they are perspicuous, simple, unaffected, pure hearted, ardent and eloquent; and I challenge the world to show more beautiful, touching, pure, and altogether exquisite compositions than the epistles of John and James, and the Gospel of the former. The Gospel and Acts by Luke, and the Gospel by Matthew, show them to have been elegant and judicious writers of narrative, and the Gospel of Mark falls not at all behind the rest in accuracy and perspicuity.

These compositions were, all of them probably, most of them certainly, written in a language which was not the native tongue of the author. Born in Palestine, these men spoke the Syriac Hebrew of their day and generation, but they wrote in Greek. The most illiterate of these despised writers could compose in a foreign language with accuracy, and even some degree of elegance; certainly in a very appropriate and intelligible style. Do such men deserve contempt as unedu-

cated, ignorant, vulgar? I will apply such epithets to no man, who, in these days of high cultivation, will show me specimens of his composition, of equal merit, in a foreign language. No, it is altogether a mistake to charge the apostles with gross ignorance, stupidity, or credulity. They were thoroughly acquainted with the Hebrew literature, which is superior, in many respects, to any the world has yet seen, and immeasurably superior to any other literature existing in their day; and they were sufficiently familiar with the Greek language to use it freely and correctly. They were men, therefore, of sufficient cultivation; and of their intelligence and credulity I am willing any one should judge by their actions and their words.

Of one of their number I have not yet spoken so particularly as he deserves to be mentioned. John was a man, not only of singular delicacy and refinement of character, very remarkable for his amiability and kindness of heart, but it is manifest that he was also of a reflecting, studious turn of mind. He had pursued the metaphysical studies which were fashionable with the Platonists of his day, and used their phraseology in the beginning of his Gospel, in such a way as he judged it might properly be used with reference to Christianity. That such vague and unnecessary terms were, however, little to his taste, may be reasonably inferred, I think, from his introducing them so very rarely after the first few verses of his Gospel.

The very different style of John from that of each of the other apostles, and the very different subjects he introduced into his narrative, must be attributed in part,

I presume, to his wish to record some things omitted by the others, and in part to the turn of mind which led him to select conversations and discussions of a metaphysical cast, and to abound in metaphorical language. This is precisely the sort of man we should call, at the present day, a refined and intellectual person; and when we read his works, it is scarcely possible to avoid seeing and admiring the rare combination of qualities both of his head and his heart. He had simplicity and tenderness, yet strength of character; an inclination to metaphysical and somewhat abstract modes of thinking, yet great clearness of expression, in general, and remarkable practicalness in all his views. What more can be desired of a man in any situation in life, and what more appropriate qualities can be imagined for the friend and biographer of the teacher of the new doctrines in religion and morals?

Having thus considered the position and character of the evangelists, and suggested to you some evidences of their singular fitness for their place and their task, I will now go on to speak of the contents of the records they have left us, what they teach, and in what light we ought to regard them.

In the first place, they contain the history of the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; next, the particulars of his miracles, and lastly, his instructions, in the various forms of precepts, parables, arguments and commands. In other words they contain the whole foundation of the Christian faith and character. They contain all the direct testimony to the miraculous character and powers of Christ, which

are the evidence of his mission from God, and they contain also the doctrines he was sent to teach men. This is the whole of Christianity. He who believes their testimony to the character and conduct of Jesus Christ, and believing that, receives the doctrines as of divine authority, and obeys, to the best of his ability, his commands, as they are set forth in the four Gospels, is entitled to the name of Christian, whether he also receives many other things which, at different times, or in the present day, have been called Christianity, or not.

It is natural, it is necessary to believe that Jesus Christ understood and taught his own religion; that, at least, he omitted nothing which was essential to its efficacy, or which constituted its peculiarity. The *peculiar doctrines* of Christianity, (a very favorite phrase with large denominations of Christians,) must be found, if any where, one would think, in the instructions of Christ himself. In my opinion they are found there, and I think that he would be a most extraordinary minister of a new religion who did not teach his own creed, and his own precepts thoroughly and clearly. Christ is not liable to this reproach. He did teach all that it is necessary to know, believe and do, to attain eternal life; and it is a sufficient answer to any man who requires you to believe that which seems to you false in religion, that you do not find it in the teachings of Jesus.

I do not think it very difficult for any one who is familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, and tolerably well acquainted with the history of the world, and the

world's opinions, down to the period of the Christian revelation, to understand, upon reading the Gospels, what it was that Christ taught ; what it is, consequently, that constitutes the essence of the Christian religion. Christianity is not, as it is made to appear, in many creeds, one mass of mysteries. No ; it is, as it was intended to be, sufficiently clear to enable people with common faculties, and with common opportunities, to understand its doctrines and its precepts ; while its sanctions are sufficiently plain to operate on the minds and hearts of the well disposed, of all degrees of intellectual capacity.

We find, in the Gospels, the most beautiful system of perfect morals ; entirely different from any thing that had been taught before among the heathen, and surpassing all that preceded it in distinctness, and comprehensiveness. It is, in reality, a system, embracing the whole round of human duties, the whole sphere of human action and thought in the department of morals. We find this system taught by authority—by authority of one who claimed to speak in the name of Jehovah, and gave proof of his commission by his miracles ; and we find him giving to his system all the sanctions which can be derived from the power of the Almighty, His moral character, and the desire of happiness which is implanted in the breasts of us all. We find him, in order to give efficacy to his doctrines, revealing a future life, so much desired by all good men and reflecting men who had ever existed, and connecting us with that future state by something more than a bare declaration, by proving experimentally that death is not the

termination of human existence, but only the birth of the soul to a new sphere and a new capacity of happy life.

We find this great teacher always and every where appealing to the highest and purest motives, always practical, consistent, and thorough, omitting nothing necessary, and insisting on nothing superfluous to a good life ; and finally, we see him setting such an example of the fulfilling of his own precepts in life and in death, as proved their sufficiency for all righteousness, both by their purity and their power, and his unwavering conviction of their truth. Is there any thing unintelligible, mysterious, or contradictory in all this ? Or, on the other hand, is there any thing unworthy of the Almighty, unbecoming him to reveal, or unnecessary for men to learn ? I cannot imagine any thing of the sort. It is the most valuable knowledge men can have ; it is the most perfect wisdom they can put in action ; and the revelation of a future life, the happiness of which is to depend upon our conduct in this, is not only consistent with, but is the best evidence of the infinite beneficence of the Deity, and illustrates all that was obscure, or seemed inconsistent with the perfection of His moral attributes, in His government of the world. If the glory of God, or the good of man be worthy of divine attention, what can more truly promote either than the doctrines and precepts taught by Christ ?

But it is said by the unbeliever that there is nothing new in Christianity ; that every one of the precepts and doctrines which are claimed as matters of revela-

tion, were acknowledged as truths, or at least regarded as wisdom, long before Christ preached, and in countries foreign and distant from Judea. Here, again, vast numbers of Christians, esteeming the simple views I have presented entirely unsatisfactory, join with the unbeliever in his representation of them, and once more we have the meeting of the extremes in ill-founded assertions, and worse founded conclusions. Is a resurrection from the dead a thing of every day occurrence? Is the despairing hope of the wise and good in former ages, and the total, absolute, undeniable disbelief of responsibility in a future state in all other classes, to be compared with the practical belief in the same doctrine at the present day, as shown in the joyful certainty of the upright, and the fearful dread of the corrupt? This difference seems to me the practical result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Who else ever pretended to rise after death? Many have pretended to the power of raising others, but who, before or since, ever pretended to have risen again himself? And where is there an accumulation of evidence equal to that contained in the four Gospels, to any miraculous occurrence?

It will perhaps be admitted that the sanctions were new, if the doctrines had been discovered before; and this alone would be enough to demonstrate the infinite importance to the world of the life and death of Jesus. But this is a very imperfect view of the case. The character of Jesus Christ is as new as the sanctions of his instructions. It was new at the time of his birth, and is equally original, unparalleled, unique at this day.

"I find no fault in him," said Pilate; and from that hour to this, no man has found a fault in him. Some have attempted the task, but how totally in vain the world has decided. This is a revelation which I contend it was worthy of God to make, and for which we should be infinitely grateful, that human nature can be so exalted, so perfect as it was in Christ Jesus.

But it appears to me that the whole argument is founded in error. It was not merely in the sanctions of doctrines previously assented to, or the perfect example he left us, that Jesus surpassed all other men. His doctrines and precepts themselves were all new; and not only so, but they were the very reverse of what was commonly held true in those days. Look at the first recorded lessons which fell from his lips. No man ever before blessed the poor in spirit, (the humble,) the mourner, the meek, the merciful, the peace maker, the pure, the persecuted, and the righteous. If all that be not new, I should like to have the parallel passage pointed out in a heathen writer or speaker. New then! Yes, it is new now, to all but the humble Christian. The boasted human faculties have set themselves in direct opposition to all this, as well since the truth was declared as before. How many believe now that humility, and peacefulness, and meekness, and mercy, are superior to their opposite qualities? How many think it better to be persecuted than to persecute? The truth is, it is all so new that men yet find it hard to believe, and still harder to practise; and all our familiarity with the words has not yet rendered us familiar with the ideas, nor

prompted us to act in very strict conformity with the principles.

"A new commandment I give unto you," said our Saviour, "that ye love one another." It was a new commandment. It is no sufficient answer to say that Cicero had already spoken, in the strongest terms, of the delight of friendship; and had even said that if kindness and affection were taken from human life, all its charm was destroyed. It was not friendship, in this limited sense, that Jesus Christ inculcated as a duty; but that wider benevolence which would embrace even enemies, and "those who despitefully use "you and persecute you." Had Cicero any idea of such a comprehensive virtue? Certainly not. His principle on this subject was probably that referred to by our Saviour. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor "(friend) and hate thine enemy;" and the idea of being kind and forgiving to an enemy would have been to him entirely new as a principle of action.

It is said too, that Cicero, as well as others of the ancients, believed in a future state. But how he believed in it, with what firmness, and with what ideas in connexion with it, is also sufficiently clear. Look at his own last faltering words in his essay on Old Age. "If I err in believing the minds of men to be immortal, I err from choice." Is that the language of a man who really, effectively believed in a future state? Compare it with the glowing terms which flow from Christian faith. "Death is swallowed up in victory." "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, "through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Then the dependence of our future state upon the character and conduct we maintain in this life, is nowhere distinctly taught as a principle to guide us, but in the Christian scriptures. This is, of course, the most important part of the whole doctrine; and so long as I believe this to be new, others may boast the discoveries of unaided human minds, and may point to Socrates, or Cicero, as sufficient guides, but I will repeat with the apostle, “Lord, to whom shall we go? ‘Thou hast the words of eternal life.’”

It seems to me a vain attempt, on the part of the unbeliever, to show that there was nothing new in the doctrines, precepts and example of Christ. So far from this was the fact that each and all were new; and not only new, but of inconceivable value to mankind, as their guide through life, and their support in death.

It is equally in vain for him who thinks that the Trinity, the atonement, the total depravity of mankind, justification by faith, and the other dogmas of Calvinism, are the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, to deny that the revelation of a future life, and its connexion with the present one, as I have presented it, the character, precepts and instructions of Christ were both new and valuable. It cannot be denied, I think, consistently with truth and reason; and all the sneers which the believers in those doctrines are apt to cast upon simple morality, founded on the motives appealed to by Christ and the apostles, fall upon the instructions of our Saviour himself. A pure life, induced by the fear and love of God, and the hope of happiness here and hereafter, was what Christ taught, what he lived

and died to exhibit in perfection, and what he rose again to establish, on imperishable proof, as the sure means of attaining an eternal state of happiness.

If others think these things of little importance compared with their mysteries and unintelligible contradictions, I can only regret that they should hold and “teach ‘for doctrines the commandments of men,’” as I think. But I condemn them not ; to their own master they stand or fall, and I only pray them to allow to me the freedom I refuse not to them. Let them not say I deny Christ, because I do not agree with Calvin, or with themselves. Let them not thrust me from the Christian church, because I do not subscribe the thirty-nine articles, so long as I profess to take the Bible for my rule of faith and practice.

But it is of little consequence whether they do or not. Their power extends not beyond the grave ; and I trust they will rise, on the morning of the resurrection, to a joyful perception of the errors which have led them to intolerance, and will not be sorry to find many good men in their company in heaven, whom they had doomed on earth to outer darkness.

Of the doctrines which form the system of Calvin, which have been, and still are, the opinions of a majority of protestants in this country,—with several modifications, according to the denomination which receives the greater part, and is still considered orthodox—I do not wish to speak at large. They strike me as so monstrous, so utterly irreconcilable with all natural and all revealed notions of God’s character and will, that I can only wonder that men of intelligence and research

can be found to embrace them. Such however is undoubtedly the case. Men of the brightest minds and purest hearts have been and are disciples of Calvin ; and while I regret what seems to me their very painful, distressing delusion, I have the highest respect for the motives which have governed them, and have led them in this dreadful path. Dreadful, at least, it would be to me to believe God was a being capable of inflicting infinite punishment on the innocent, for the sake of relieving the guilty from all suffering ; dreadful, to believe that men by nature were wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually, and that even the merits of Christ, as they understand them, could not suffice to save more than a very small proportion of mankind from eternal torture.

But, thank God, these horrid doctrines are not to be found in the Gospels. The very inventors and defenders of them scarcely pretend to justify one of them by the language of Christ himself, and the little they can refer to in his instructions is so manifestly misunderstood by them, that I should almost be willing to leave you, without help, to refute their arguments from the very passages they quote.

You may ask me how the existence of such opinions of Christian truth is to be accounted for, if their foundation be so slight ; and I think it will not be difficult to answer the question. You will recollect that those who hold them, believe in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures ; i. e. they think every word is the word of God. Of course, one word, phrase, or sentence is as true and important as another. But it is not possible

for the human mind, with its present imperfection, to hold every sentence in exactly equal regard, nor to have every one equally present to the memory, at all times. Some will impress themselves more upon the mind than others ; will take possession of a larger share of the reflections than others. This is especially the case with passages which appeal to the imagination, or are the ardent expression of the feelings.

One of these strong texts, as for instance the assertion of Jeremiah, “the heart is deceitful above all “things, and desperately wicked,” takes possession of the mind for a time, and ere long it comes out in the shape of the doctrine of total depravity, i. e. of the entire, absolute opposition of every unregenerate human being, to every thing that is good, and his inclination to every thing that is evil ; and it is forgotten that our Saviour himself said that “the good man, out of the “good treasures of his heart, bringeth forth good “things.” There were such beings as good men, therefore, before Jesus Christ was born, or preached ; and before Christian regeneration was ever heard of. But the one sentence has made a deep impression, the other is forgotten ; and the former gradually becomes a fixed idea, and every thing must be made to bend to it, and a whole system of theology may grow out of as slight a foundation as that. I believe that the system of Calvin is based upon this very doctrine ; or at least, this is a necessary part of it.

If, on the other hand, the several books of the Bible, are regarded, as I have endeavored to show you they should be, as the productions of men, with different

characters and under different circumstances, then allowance will be made for these things, and the whole will not be considered as placed upon one level of equal authority. The vehement language of poetry, or rhetoric, will not be set down as an expression of strict philosophical or moral truth, not to be counterbalanced by any other assertion; but poetry, and feeling, and doctrine, and precept will all fall into their proper places, and hold their proper relative rank; and no particular passage will be allowed to supersede the authority of all others, nor will one dogma banish the recollection of the truths which pervade the whole collection of works.

Another facility for the adoption of any doctrine, however preposterous it may appear, is a false use of the world mystery. This term is properly applied to assertions which we do not understand, or subjects about which we have no clear ideas; and is improperly applied to assertions, or theories, which involve contradictions or inconsistencies. For instance, if a man tells me it is a very mysterious circumstance that a juggler should be able to have the same ball, of an inch in diameter, in both hands at once, when his hands are a yard asunder, I should say it was very strange that any one should call a simple impossibility a mystery. There is no mystery about it. I understand perfectly what the man means to assert, and I can see reason perhaps for thinking him honest in his assertion; and I see that he uses the word mystery in a wrong sense. The assertion is the assertion of a falsehood, not of a mystery.

If a philosopher, however, tells me he does not understand the process of assimilation in plants and animals, that wonderful process by which each flower is adorned with its colors, and each animal endowed with its appropriate powers, I perceive that this is properly a mystery to the human mind at present. We do not know, as yet, the means by which it is effected. We have no theory about it. It is an unknown process, and one the understanding of which seems to be beyond the reach of our faculties. At all events it is beyond our present knowledge. But it involves no absurdity or contradiction. The philosopher is not talking nonsense, or telling me a falsehood ; but a striking truth, which illustrates, in a beautiful manner, the difference between divine and human power. God every hour does that of which man cannot discover the method.

Suppose now that, hereafter, a philosopher should arise who should discover the means, the *modus operandi*, by which all this is done ; should show us the difference in the organization of two rose trees which makes the flower of one white, and that of the other red ; should explain why some portion of the grass eaten by a buffalo should become horn, while no portion of a similar grass eaten by a horse ever shoots out upon his head in the shape or consistency of horn. He would be a great and wise man clearly ; but what should we say of him in relation to this subject ? Undoubtedly, that he had unravelled the mystery ; that he had rendered intelligible that which was unintelligible before.

A mystery, then, is susceptible of explanation. A falsehood, contradiction, or inconsistency is incapable

of explanation. Reason and argue about it as you please, it remains a falsehood, contradiction, or inconsistency still; and nothing can change its nature. It matters not whether the topic be physical nature, morals, or religion. An absurdity, or contradiction, in either is a very different thing from a mystery. And let no man beguile you with a misuse of this word.

If you believe that God is just, you cannot believe that He has punished the innocent in order to allow the guilty to go free, for this is inconsistent with the radical idea of justice. If you believe Him to have punished the innocent instead of the guilty, then you cannot believe Him to be just; for it is only a misuse of the word to apply it to a judge who does such an act of injustice. Reflect upon it as you may, the idea of the infliction of punishment on the wrong person is utterly irreconcilable with the idea of justice, and you cannot believe both to be true of God, any more than of a human being. If you say the scriptures teach us that Christ suffered, "the just for the unjust," I reply that such an expression does not tend in the slightest degree to prove a vicarious suffering; that it is perfectly intelligible on a different theory, and I will not believe a man in his senses to write folly, if there be any way in which he can be supposed to have written wisdom.

So of the doctrine of the Trinity. If you tell me that the One Lord of heaven and earth exists in three persons, each of which is not only equal to each of the others, but equal to all three together, I answer that you are telling me not a mystery, but an absurdity; just as great as if, in physics, you were to tell me that

the three sides of a triangle were not only equal to each other, but that each was also equal to all three, itself included. I perceive you use terms inconsistently with their meaning, and nothing can, by any possibility, make such assertions consistent with truth and reason.

Some of the unavoidable consequences of the doctrine of the Trinity are not merely shocking, but if they were spoken with irreverence, would be universally regarded as blasphemous. That God should be born of a woman, His own creation, should suffer, and finally should *die*, are assertions which, however inconceivable is the fact, have been made, not by the profane and the scoffing, but by the serious, devout believer, for many ages, and must be made by all who are consistent Trinitarians. No wonder they maintain that the use of reason should be abandoned in the study of the scriptures. But I will not pursue this course of remark, as I do not wish to make this little book controversial any farther than is absolutely necessary to explain my own views, and to caution you against what appear to me dreadful errors.

I turn, with delight, from the doctrines which are not contained in the Bible, and from the traditions which make the word of God of none effect, to the truths which are taught there, and the precepts the observance of which will lead us to the perfection of character exhibited by Jesus Christ, and the perfection of happiness proposed to us as the reward of our efforts. The attributes of God are every where, in the Bible, represented as perfect, and in the Gospels He is shown in the most endearing and attractive light in which it is

possible to bring Him to our minds. He was called “Our Father” by Jesus Christ, not for the first time, certainly, but in a manner and with a frequency, which showed how it was that Christ himself habitually regarded Him, and in effect to make a new impression with regard to His relations to men.

The rules for human action, to train the character to at least a humble imitation of the divine perfection, are also unexceptionable. Whoever conscientiously and truly seeks to form his character by those rules, will become, I say not perfect, for that, in the strict sense, is impossible; but excellent. The mere effort will improve the character, and continued effort will not fail to lead to continued improvement, and no limit can be assigned to this process. That we may not sit down in despairing consciousness of our sins and imperfections, God promises to help us, and sets before us the example of good men, and especially of Jesus Christ, who though “he was in all points tempted like ‘as we are, was yet without sin,’ ” and holds out to us an infinite reward in a future state. Every good motive which can be roused is appealed to, the love and fear of God, gratitude both to our Maker and our Saviour, love to our fellow men, and finally, regard to our own happiness. Nothing is wanting which can tend to make us better, and the revelation of God’s will respecting our character and destination was neither unworthy of Him, nor unimportant to us. The whole plan is well adjusted, and perfectly executed. The means, the opportunity, and the inducements to virtue are presented to mankind, and they are left to embrace

or reject the offers of divine goodness and mercy, according to their understanding and inclination. Virtue, and that alone, is required of us as the passport to eternal life.

If it were desirable to men, and suitable to God's character to give the world a perfect guide through life, and an all sufficient support in death, then it was desirable and suitable that Christ should teach these truths, and teach them with authority, though some of them might have been partially known and imperfectly understood before. Authority was the very thing which was necessary in order to make them valuable; and that was given to them by the miraculous powers and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is one thing more, contained in the Gospels, to which I wish to call your attention, as a beautiful completion of the whole system, the adoption of two simple rites as means of promoting and sustaining the religion. The evening before his crucifixion, when Jesus expressed in his discourse the tenderest feelings of which human nature can conceive, and commended his disciples to God in the most sublime and pathetic prayer which language can convey, he supped with the apostles, and enjoined it upon them to repeat the meeting in memory of him. Imagine them assembling in after times, as in their harassed lives they had opportunity, to renew this simple feast. How would not their hearts melt within them, as they read the words which it is easy to believe were already recorded by the beloved John! What emotions must have bound them to each other, to the memory of their Lord, and to their

duty as his disciples ! It seems to me impossible to imagine any thing more perfectly adapted to the end designed, of keeping alive the memory and the love of their master, than this touching, simple rite. Original, characteristic, beautiful, however it may have been changed under the operation of time and circumstances, it is still the most solemn, impressive and improving ceremony which is known in the world. It is adapted at once to the character of Christ, the character of his religion, and the character of the human heart ; which, however corrupt, is yet capable of improvement from the contemplation of the perfect, and can still sympathise with pure and holy affection.

Among the last words of Jesus, recorded by St. Matthew, are these, "Go ye therefore and teach all "nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, "and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" thus adopting the form which was already well known to his countrymen, of washing with water, as a sign of admission to the fellowship of his followers. Nothing can be more appropriately significant of purity, that purity of design which is necessary to desire, in sincerity, communion with Christ, and that purity of life which is necessary to constitute a perfect disciple. Both these rites are remarkable, not merely for their simplicity, but for their adaptation to the circumstances of all men, for the facility with which they may be perpetuated, and for the beautiful meaning they are intended to convey. They are not confined, like the ceremonies of the Hebrews, to a particular people, or a particular place ; nor, like the ceremonies of false

religions, do they consecrate a particular spot, or render indispensable cruel inflictions.

In conclusion, there is a single point which I wish you to consider attentively. The religion of Jesus Christ, as I have endeavored to set it before you, is simple, intelligible, of infinite value both in life and in death, suited to the condition of the human race, and to the character of God; involving no contradictions, no absurdities, but exhibiting a symmetry, completeness and perfection which mark its divine origin. So admirable is the latter quality that many men, with clear and strong perceptions of it, have deemed this alone, without miracles, sufficient proof that Jesus was the Son of God. I think this perfection and symmetry would be destroyed, if the external proofs of the character and powers of Christ were wanting; but with them, as they actually exist, nothing is wanting to establish, in the most conclusive manner, his divine authority, and perfectly show forth the beneficence of God in his dealings with men. It is, in truth, a revelation of the character and will of God, so far as we are interested to know them.

But if the doctrines to which I have repeatedly alluded be true, it ceases to be a revelation, so far as they are concerned, i. e. so far as the whole religion is concerned. For instead of revealing any thing, they only mystify and confound all natural notions of God's character and will. These were much clearer before than after Trinitarianism and Calvinism began. Now what sort of revelation is that which confuses the intellect, blinds it to its real position, and actually re-

verses the natural dictates of the understanding and the heart? That which remains a mystery has never been revealed; else it would have ceased to be a mystery. Still less can what was a simple, intelligible truth be converted into a mystery by revelation. Truth may be made clearer, or may have authority given to it by revelation; but whenever it is rendered less clear and intelligible than it was before, the process by which this is done is not called revelation, but might be considered as multiplying "words without knowledge."

I do not propose to go into any explanation of particular difficulties of phraseology which may occur in the New Testament. The general considerations I have presented are designed to satisfy you that whatever they may be, they cannot be a serious obstacle to a fervent faith in the religion taught in these books; and even that if there were inexplicable difficulties, there is enough which is clear and certain to overpower them, and compel your assent to the great truths of Christianity. I will only recall to your minds, before proceeding to speak of the other books, the remark I have made, that the Gospels contain a satisfactory and full statement of all that was taught and revealed by Christ; in other words, the peculiar, essential doctrines and precepts of his religion.

CHAPTER XII. THE ACTS AND EPISTLES.

What should we expect to find in the lives and letters of the apostles, if we had never read them? Probably, we should look for some account of the efforts they made to spread the truth, and of their views of its nature and importance. We should look upon these contemporary explanations and comments and exhortations, discourses and actions, as of the utmost importance in illustrating the character and objects of the first disciples, and explaining their views of the nature of the religion. But we should not expect to find any thing that might, with propriety, be called a further revelation; nor with any thing in the slightest degree tending to subvert the simplicity or the truths of the Gospel. If these men be honest, we should say to ourselves, we shall find them laboring, ardently and perseveringly, in the cause of their master, and exhibiting their own particular characters in their several modes of doing it; we shall find in them “ diversities of gifts, but the same “ spirit;” we shall find them exhibiting in their lives the influence of the truths they had been taught, and were themselves teaching. If they be dishonest, they will be found contending for the mastery over each other, and living upon their converts, as false prophets are apt to do; and in the contentions that would ensue, the spirit of the religion would evaporate, and its lifeless body fall, not to rise again.

We open the books, and find them precisely what we could wish and hope. The apostles were blameless in their lives and conversations, earnestly at work in the conversion of Jews and Gentiles ; ardent, affectionate, argumentative or practical, according to their temperament and attainments, but all of them upright, conscientious, intelligent, and some of them learned and accomplished men.

The most remarkable event, recorded in the history of the apostles by Luke, is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to belief in the divine mission of Jesus Christ. He was a man of great ability, of ardent temperament, powerful in action as in intellect, zealous, persevering, high minded and conscientious. The acquisition of such a mind and heart to the cause was of vast importance to the early progress of Christianity ; and the traces of his labors have been left upon every succeeding age of the Church. It might have been considered fortunate, by some persons, if his writings had contained fewer things which St. Peter described as hard to be understood. Yet I am slow to say even that. The misconceptions of those passages have led to clearer views of the truths he was discussing, and have resulted in bringing forth light out of the very obscurity that was caused by them.

St. Paul was a profound and an abstract thinker. At the same time, he was a man of great ardor ; and he would pursue a thought, and state it strongly, till it would almost seem as if he had forgotten that the subject could be viewed in any other light.

If, however, the point he is urging be understood

and kept in view, it is not, in general, difficult to perceive what limitations he would himself have given to his general assertions, if he had intended to state the whole subject in a cool, philosophical manner. Every body perceives that it is very unjust to take the vehement declarations of one who is arguing a case, as if they were the calm assertions of a philosophical and indifferent observer. Yet this injustice is what causes the difficulty of much of St. Paul's writings. Bear in mind what it is he is reasoning about, or urging, and then read a whole epistle at once, and I think you will not make any great mistakes as to his design, or his meaning. Never take a single line, or text, and hardly even a paragraph, without comparing it with the rest of the epistle, and ascertaining its relation to the subject and the argument. I must illustrate my meaning by a sentence which is often in the mouths of disputants upon controversial points, and which strikingly shows the necessity of the comparison I have mentioned.

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace
“with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom
“also we have access by faith into this grace wherein
“we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”
Rom. 5. 1, 2.

Justification by faith, in the polemical sense of the words, means admission to the happiness of heaven, in consequence of our belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, in his atoning for our sins, and in all the other supposed effects of his death, and without any dependence upon the character of our own works. None of our acts, it is said, can be good, or so good as to give

us any merit in the eyes of God, and consequently none of them singly, nor all of them put together can give us a claim to admission to heaven; and therefore faith alone saves us; our works are of no avail; indeed the self-esteem which is generated by what are called good works is rather an obstacle to our getting there, and it would be better not to have it. And this is the doctrine which it is contended by many is maintained by St. Paul in the sentence I have quoted, among others. The end of the whole matter, according to this view, is that the Apostle of the Gentiles is made to preach the most demoralizing doctrine, viz: that good and evil works are equally valueless, and that all which is important is that our faith be right.

This very great perversion, as it seems to me, of the design of St. Paul, arises, I believe, from want of consideration of the object he had in view in writing to the Romans. He dwelt upon the importance of faith in Christ. Why did he do this? Because if we do not believe in him, and in his promises and revelation of the mercy of God, we have nothing else to console us under our consciousness of guilt and sin. Every man, be he Jew or Gentile, has this consciousness, the Jew of imperfect obedience to the law of Moses, the Gentile of imperfect obedience to the law of nature. And nowhere is there any offer of pardon for these offences, this imperfect obedience of which we are all conscious, but in the gracious promises of God's mercy which Christ has made. Come then to him, believe in him, and you will find peace to your troubled minds. If you wish to be justified, or accounted just,

and rewarded as just, it must be by means of the pardon God will grant to your sins. There is no other way to obtain eternal life except by perfect obedience. You all know you have not performed this. Come then to Christ. It is by him we have access to this grace, any knowledge of the kindness and merciful disposition of God ; and you cannot have the consolation of this promise, unless you believe the words of Jesus Christ, and that the knowledge of the truth has come to us by him. It is by faith in him, therefore, that we stand in this grace, and can rejoice in hope of the glory of the Lord. Such faith does not dispense with good works. If we believe that the mercy of God is revealed to us by Jesus Christ, we must also believe what he told us about the means of obtaining it, repentance, and doing works meet for repentance. I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, which, as Jesus has told us, is ready to forgive the sins you repent of and forsake, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

It appears to me that this is a mode of interpretation which makes the epistle consistent with itself, with common sense, and with true Christianity ; while the former scheme seems inconsistent with all three.

In another place St. Paul says, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect ? It is God that justifieth ; who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again ;” i. e. Who shall reproach those whom God has selected to receive the glad tidings of the Gospel, with their sins ? Who

shall say, they sin like other men, and like other men they must suffer? True, we come short of our duty, but we have the blessed hope that God will yet favorably regard us, and pardon and justify us. Who shall condemn us to the eternal sleep themselves expect? Do we not know that Christ died that he might rise again, and prove to us that the future life was no idle dream? Well might he add, that nothing could separate the love of God from the Christian's heart, for the mercy which he had promised by His Son, our Lord.

Observe here, particularly, that St. Paul lays more stress upon the resurrection than upon the death of Christ. But according to the system from which I differ, it is the death of Christ which is all important, as the great atonement to God's justice for human sin. So in that glorious passage in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul says, with a repetition which marks his earnestness and his sense of the importance of what he was urging, "If Christ be not *risen*, then is "our preaching vain," &c. "If Christ be not *raised*, "your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." "But "now is Christ *risen* from the dead," &c. Why all this earnestness about the resurrection? If the proof of a future life was so unimportant a matter, both to the unenlightened heathen and the elect Christian, compared with the doctrine of Christ's having suffered and died for sin which he did not commit, why does St. Paul dwell on the resurrection, and never so much as once say that the death of Jesus was the important doctrine? He declares, plainly enough, that if Christ

be raised, then belief in him is not in vain. Why does he not say, if Christ died and made atonement for sin, faith in him is not vain? Simply because, as I believe, it never entered into his head that any body would ever devise so extraordinary a scheme; or that from passages in his own writings there would be drawn doctrines that positively run counter to his elaborate arguments.

In the epistle to the Romans he was talking and reasoning about the Jews, and those heathen who were favored by God with the knowledge of the truth in matters of religion, and urging them by this divine mercy, to show themselves worthy of it by pure and holy lives. How could he imagine that the words he used to describe them, "God's elect," would ever be understood to mean those whom God had arbitrarily selected for future happiness, without regard to their moral character; and that these men were to be considered as justified by God in all their actions, whether right or wrong, because Christ, in his death, had paid the penalty for their sins? Does not this seem to you an altogether monstrous perversion of the whole of Christianity, and a wonderful interpretation of St. Paul? Not only so, but it appears to me one of the most dangerous doctrines to the purity of the world that could possibly be devised; and I regard it as a living and perpetual proof of the divine origin of Christianity, of its having been adapted to the human heart by Him who created both, that notwithstanding all the perversions of its simple truths, and the corruptions of its beautiful forms, its being overlaid with ceremonies, and buried under hea-

thenish rites, and obscured by metaphysical abstractions, it has yet been able to make men better, under all even of its worst forms ; and that its true spirit may still be discovered by study, and a sincere desire to seek and to follow its light.

I am very sorry to be obliged to speak as I do of doctrines which have been held for centuries by excellent and wise persons, and are now held by many whom I am glad to reckon among my friends, and for whose talents and dispositions I have very great respect. But my regard for them ought not to blind me to what I think their errors, nor lead me to speak with favor of opinions which seem to me dangerous, as well as erroneous. I know the uprightness of these excellent persons, and that they hold these views with perfect conscientiousness, and that their natural integrity of character, cultivated as it is by their habitual piety, and self-denial, will save them from the practical consequences of their theoretic principles. There is little harm in a wrong metaphysical scheme, provided it does not become the basis of conduct in conformity with it. And as long as I know that “pure religion and undefiled, before God and the father, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep him [one’s] self unspotted from the world,” so long as I believe that the kingdom has been prepared, “from the foundation of the world,” for those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and are kind to the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner, I shall feel no uncomfortable doubts as to the future condition of those I love and respect, whatever may be the creed they adopt. I

know they practise the virtues required, and by them, and not by their belief in this or that article of a technical theology, will their future happiness be secured. They think, on the contrary, that want of faith in their creed endangers my future welfare, and that of those who agree with me; and this I look upon as one of the worst and most unhappy consequences of their doctrine. It makes them presumptuous and overbearing, if their temper be harsh; it makes them miserable from sympathy, if their temper be kind.

You may ask the very natural question, how I know that I am right, and others wrong. I answer, that I do not pretend to *know* any thing in the same sense that God knows the absolute truth, with perfect freedom from error. But I seek, and hope to have attained truth upon this subject by the same process as upon others. The Copernican system of the universe I believe, and think I know, to be true, and the Ptolemaic false, though it has been held by wise men. Why? Because the former is more consistent with my reason, and with what I am permitted to observe of the works of God. And the religious truths I hold seem to me, in like manner, more consistent with my reason, and with what I can discover in the records of the revelations God has made to man. It is in this sense I believe, and think I know them to be true; to me, at least, they are true; and I endeavor to satisfy you and others of the fact, not only for the sake of the truth itself, but because I think these opinions have the happiest effect upon the character, and would lead all

to see, acknowledge and adore the goodness of God, to understand their own position, to perceive and to perform their own duty.

But let us return to the more agreeable subject, the contemplation of St. Paul's character and conduct. It was impossible that a man of his vigorous mind, extensive learning, and varied accomplishments, should not take an active part in the efforts to extend the religion whose disciples he had once persecuted. We accordingly find him writing, travelling and speaking more than the other apostles, and with a power, eloquence, ardor and effect which completely satisfy the expectation. One cannot reasonably desire more of any suitable quality than is to be found in St. Paul; nor can one readily imagine any thing he should have done, and did not do, or should have said, and did not say. There are no more skilful and finished specimens of eloquence than his orations, especially his defence before Festus and Agrippa; nor are there any where more acute logical arguments, or more fervent, honest zeal, or more pure and elevated sentiments, or more thorough, heartfelt piety, than are to be found in his letters to the various churches and individuals he addressed.

Where now is the argument that the apostles were vulgar, uneducated persons, unable to discern between truth and falsehood, reality and imposture? If learning, genius, knowledge of the world, sagacity, and uprightness constitute a competent witness, then St. Paul deserves to be believed; and if any will doubt what such a man reports as of his own experience, and argues for on grounds which have satisfied him, "neither

"will they be persuaded though one rose from the
"dead."

It would almost seem as if the conversion of St. Paul were designed as a special and particular answer to this anticipated objection. There are other sufficient answers, but this is decided, and direct. Here is the very man pointed out by the objector as wanting, coming forward boldly, ardently, perseveringly, and carrying with him conviction and satisfaction to thousands then and since, and to myriads of generations, I trust, yet to be born.

I shall not go into verbal criticism on the language of the epistles, any more than I did upon that of the Gospels. It would swell out this little book to a vast size, without necessity, for there are abundant sources of all the information you need upon this point. I will, however, mention one treatise which I desire you particularly to study, as one of the most admirable specimens of ingenious investigation ever produced. It has particular reference to the life of St. Paul, and compares what is told of him in the Acts with incidental remarks and casual observations in the epistles. It is not exactly verbal criticism, but it serves to explain many a sentence, and will put you in the way of finding out much truth. I refer to the work of Paley, called *Horaæ Paulinae*. The object is to shew the truth of the account in Acts from these incidental circumstances in the epistles and vice versa; and the necessary inference is, if the history in Acts be true, that in the Gospels must be true also, and so Christianity is established.

Whatever difficulties there are, in the language of the epistles, are found principally in those of St. Paul, as those of Peter, James, John and Jude are sufficiently intelligible on careful perusal. So I think you will find even those of St. Paul too, if you will ascertain and reflect upon the circumstances of those whom he addressed, and the object he had in view, and then read a whole epistle consecutively, so as to get an idea of his argument and illustration, his doctrines and his precepts. My only design is to give you some general views of the subject, to point out the object you should have in view, and the general means of obtaining it; and if I shall have succeeded, in any good degree, it will be a great reward for a pleasant labor.

The only remaining book in the Bible is the Revelation of St. John; and of this I can say nothing which is at all satisfactory. It is a work the design of which I do not understand, and of which I have never seen an explanation that seemed even plausible. It is a mysterious production, in the true sense of the word mysterious; it is unintelligible, dark; and though it is called revelation, it seems to have revealed nothing to any body, unless it were to St. John himself. There is nothing in it unworthy of an apostle, and the descriptions are, to say the least of them, of a very high poetic character, and if they are also prophetic, the probability is, that the events to which they relate not having yet occurred, their application is not and cannot be understood.

Let it remain then a sealed book, and be not alarmed at any of the fanciful interpretations which occa-

sionally agitate the world. Heretofore explanations have been attempted by many persons little competent to the task, and if, hereafter, any learned man should produce a satisfactory explanation of it, I have little doubt that it will be found of no agitating or exciting nature. Excitement and agitation are things not encouraged by Christianity. True religion is designed to produce permanent influences upon the heart and character, not transient emotions ; and although it is not impossible that a strong emotion, may produce lasting effects, yet the probability is the other way ; and the more violent the excitement, the less likely it is to leave a deep impression.

Generally when men attempt to get up an agitation in the community, upon any subject, it is either for some selfish object, or to procure a certain notoriety which some persons covet as if it were great gain to them. In most cases, if they did but know the private opinion of calm observers, they would find the gain was no equivalent for the loss.

Our Saviour was once asked, by some of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come. His reply was, “The kingdom of God cometh not with ‘observation ; neither shall they say, Lo here ! or Lo there ! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.’” This was a perfect answer to those who imagined the Messiah’s kingdom was to be the temporal splendor of the Jewish nation. Is it not also a perfect answer to those who produce agitation upon religious subjects, who attract “observation” to themselves,

and who induce others to exclaim “Lo here” is the guide to heaven, “Lo there” is the church which is the gate thereof?

Agitation and excitement, on the subject, are much more nealy allied to the imagination, or to sympathy, than to religion, or to the religious sentiment; and I pray you to recollect that “the kingdom of God is within—“in you.” God knows whether that kingdom in your breast is governed by His laws or not, and it is no matter whether you be “observed” by others to conform to them. Let it suffice you to know yourselves. Be not anxious that others should know you. “Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God.” It is sure that if your hearts be right with God, others will take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus.

But it is, after all, “a small thing to be judged of “man’s judgment,” compared with the decree which God will, one day, pass upon us. The preparation for this is the true object of life; and if that be effected we need not and we shall not, be afraid to die. There is but one way to make this preparation, and that is “to keep your conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.” It is necessary to seek and study what is right, that you may not mistake your duty; it is necessary to pray for God’s blessing on your efforts, which without that can never succeed, and the blessing will not come unless it be asked; and lastly it is necessary to be in earnest; and to persevere in your exertions to do the work which is given

you to do. If that be accomplished, the object of your existence is attained; and you will be removed to another sphere of life and happiness, with faculties of perception, of reason, and of enjoyment improved by the discipline of life.

But it is true, not only of the future world, but of this, that in keeping the commandments of God “there is great reward.” If you seek for happiness and would avoid misery here, do it by the same course by which you hope to attain the life that is to come, “by living soberly, righteously and piously.” Be grateful to God, not merely for having created you to live in this pleasant world, but for having given you a sure guide to increasing happiness both here and hereafter. Contemplate the goodness which has provided for you not merely the ordinary blessings of existence, but these especial advantages over so large a portion of mankind, till your love of God grows ardent, and you feel that you can and ought to love Him with all your heart. Contemplate the character of Jesus Christ till you become emulous of it, and seek to follow in his steps. And that you may keep the most important truths and principles fresh in your memories and your hearts, truths and principles which are important for “the life that now is, and for that which is to come,”

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